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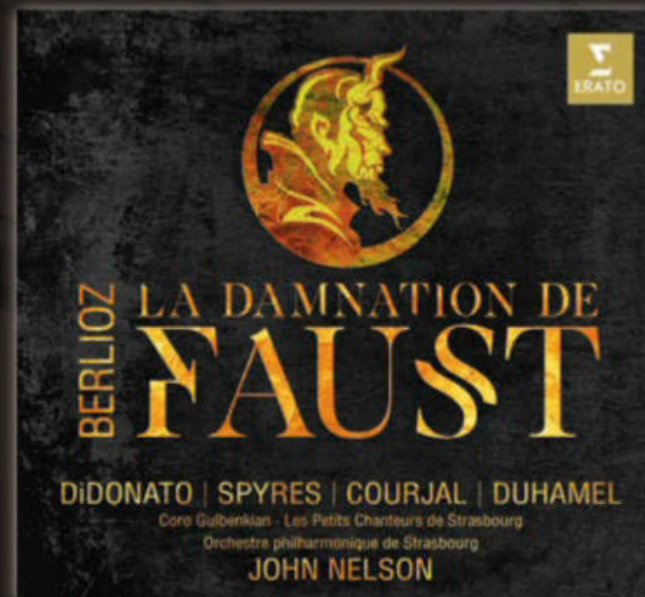


NEW RELEASES ON WARNER CLASSICS AND ERATO



JOHN NELSON, MICHAEL SPYRES PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA & CHORUS

Experience Hector Berlioz's monumental Requiem - Grande Messe des Morts, recorded live at St Paul's Cathedral with Berlioz scholar John Nelson, Michael Spyres and the Philharmonia orchestra.



JOHN NELSON, JOYCE DIDONATO, MICHAEL SPYRES STRASBOURG PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

Following in the triumphant footsteps of Les Troyens, also recorded at the Auditorium Erasme in Strasbourg, this performance reunites Nelson and the Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg with Michael Spyres, Joyce DiDonato and Nicolas Courjal.



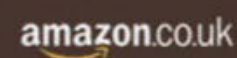
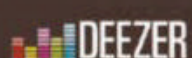
ALISON BALSOM BALSOM ENSEMBLE

Virtuoso trumpeter Alison Balsom OBE makes her keenly awaited return to recording with Royal Fireworks, a majestic new album of Baroque classics and dazzling new arrangements.



JAKUB JÓZEF ORLIŃSKI IL POMO D'ORO, MAXIM EMEYANYCHEV

Gramophone Young Artist of the Year award winner Jakub Józef Orliński returns with Facce d'amore, a sparkling new solo album of Baroque arias which includes no less than eight world-premiere recordings.



GRAMOPHONE

ISOUNDS OF AMERICA

A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

Karchin

Jane Eyre

Jennifer Zetlan *sop* Jane Eyre

Ryan MacPherson *ten* Edward Rochester

Thomas Meglioranza *bar* Roderick Ingram/St John Rivers

Jessica Thompson *sop* Mrs Ingram/Diana Rivers

Katrina Thurman *sop* Blanche Ingram

Kimberly Giordano *sop* Mrs Fairfax

Adam Cannedy *bar* Richard Mason/Mr Briggs

Jessica Best *mez* Mary Rivers/Bessie

David Salsbery Fry *bass* Mr Wood

Orchestra of the League of Composers /

Louis Karchin

Naxos American Opera Classics ⑧ ② 8 669042/3

(130' • DDD)

Includes synopsis and libretto



In 2016 at Hunter College, New York, the Center for

Contemporary Opera staged the world premiere of *Jane Eyre*, in which composer Louis Karchin and librettist Diane Osen seized on the relentless flow of fire and brimstone that made Charlotte Brontë's fame. Recorded a year later at SUNY Purchase with the original cast, it sounds sumptuously melodramatic, and there is no downplaying Rochester's dark side here; in the theatre it must have been hair-raising.

Karchin and Osen hewed closely to the nature of Brontë's writing: the score is emotionally intense down to the smallest details, so the extravagant behaviour of the characters seems reasonable. The resulting fierce narrative ignites larger-than-life theatrical outbursts that are perfect for arias and ensemble pieces, brilliantly aided and abetted by the virtuoso Orchestra of the League of Composers. From the opening strains of melody, when chiaroscuro colours anticipate this will be a moody, highly inventive score, there is no abating in the energy, just like the novel.

Jennifer Zetlan as Jane has the greatest music and sings it triumphantly; her biographical aria leading to 'A governess

in this great house' is simply glorious and charged with chemistry. Ryan MacPherson fills out Rochester's personality thrillingly, and shows versatility as the creepily insinuating fortune teller.

Karchin's charming musical candy box includes a broad range of influences from Bruckner to Tchaikovsky, including the highly entertaining use of excerpts from *Lucia di Lammermoor*. The English libretto is effectively compacted but occasionally lends the enterprise a Gilbert & Sullivan swagger. **Laurence Vittes**

Meyer

'Ring Out'

But Not Until^a. I Only Speak of the Sun^b.

Only the Beginning^c. Released^d. Ring

out, wild bells^e. Seasons of Basho^f

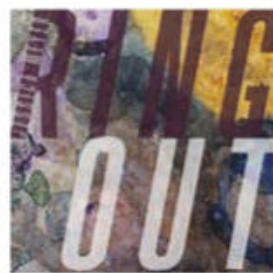
^f**Nicholas Tamagna** *countertenor*

^{bc}**Miranda Cuckson** *vn* ^{abcf}**Jessica Meyer** *va*

^b**Caleb van der Swaagh**, ^{ad}**Andrew Yee** *vcs*

^f**Adam Marks** *pf* ^e**Roomful of Teeth**

Bright Shiny Things ⑧ BSTC0128 (52' • DDD • T)



In each of Jessica Meyer's differently configured works from the last five

years, knife-edge anticipation opens on to unexpected, often ecstatic musical realms, always with a personal touch and imaginatively written for the instruments.

The newest, *I Only Speak of the Sun*, which is skittish around major keys, was inspired by Rumi – 'I will bring you love's wine, for I am born of the sun'. The end comes preceded by radiant shafts of light triggering bursts of energy and a dizzying erotic scamper. Definitely a relationship between lovers.

Ring out, wild bells, performed by the vocal octet Roomful of Teeth, was inspired by hearing church bells in Paris on an Easter morning. Premiered at the TANK Center for Sonic Arts during a Summer Solstice concert, it starts out like a Christmas carol and achieves a Tallis-like ecstasy before ending in pale violet sadness.

The Attacca Quartet's cellist Andrew Yee gives *Released* an emotionally charged

performance; amid its wealth of gadgets, including a 'Dead Man's Tuning' from Appalachian fiddling, Yee finds a pulse that reveals deep pools of consoling majesty.

In *Seasons of Basho*, countertenor Nicholas Tamagna mesmerises Meyer and pianist Adam Marks with moments of golden silence among his unwaveringly lovely sweet tones, using the cyclical changing of the year as a metaphor for the highs and lows of obsessive love.

Cuckson and Meyer combine in *Only the Beginning*, inspired by Indira Gandhi, Poulenc and the Catholic Mass, to reflect on what sacrifice means in an Ivesian, conversational tone. Meyer and Yee combine on *But Not Until*, a haunted crossing against a landscape of echoes.

Laurence Vittes

Reale

Bassoon Sonata, 'Dies irae'. Eleven Miniatures.

Flute Sonata, 'Children's Place'. Horn Call.

Oboe Sonata. Transfiguration

Christopher Guzman *pf* **The Borealis Wind Quintet**

MSR Classics ⑧ MS1715 (64' • DDD)



Paul Reale (b1943 in New Jersey) studied at Columbia in the 1960s with Chou

Wen-chung (with whom he had first studied composition privately) and Otto Luening, and later 'came under the influence of' Rochberg and Crumb. His catalogue includes a wealth of chamber and instrumental works, including 12 piano sonatas, plus vocal works and many concertos – three for the piano.

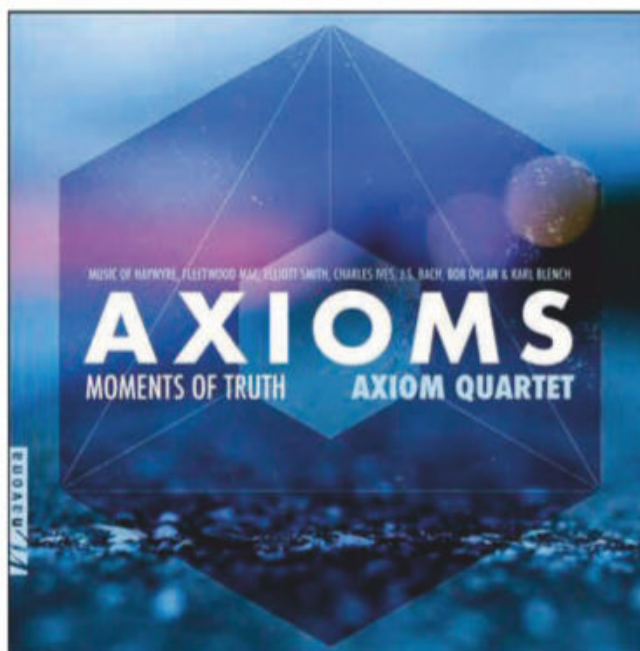
Reale's music does not really sound like any of his former mentors. Its style is recognisably early 21st-century postmodernist, tonally based but having little truck with minimalism. It is well written without being overtly challenging to listen to, but sufficiently interesting to bear repeated listening, as in the rather fine Flute Sonata (1983, rev 2017), its three movements cast as a diptych, the opening 'Welcome' followed by a 'Repose' dovetailed into the concluding 'Romp'.



THE ARC IN THE SKY THE CROSSING

Multiple GRAMMY Award-winning chamber choir **The Crossing** moves listeners with their Navona Records release **THE ARC IN THE SKY**, a breathtaking performance of the work by accomplished choral composer **Kile Smith**. Based on texts by Robert Lax (1915–2000), it constitutes an American pilgrimage into spirituality. **NAVONA RECORDS (NV6240)**

www.crossingchoir.org
www.navonarecords.com/catalog/nv6240



AXIOMS AXIOM QUARTET

An axiom is a self-evident truth, and everything on this album represents different aspects of truth. On their debut album, Navona Records' **AXIOMS**, Axiom Quartet probes the soul and delivers a deeply satisfying statement on truth and inner fulfillment through classical pieces, string arrangements of popular music, and their own compositions. **NAVONA RECORDS (NV6151)**

www.axiomquartet.com
www.navonarecords.com/catalog/nv6151



DASHING

Navona Records presents **DASHING**, a festive album for the holiday season featuring several outstanding composers. Enjoy contemporary works like the rousing *Rocket Sleigh* and arrangements of holiday favorites from *Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy* to *O Holy Night* and more. Each piece is brought to life by uplifting performances from **The Stanbery Singers**, the **Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra**, and the **Salt Lake City Jazz Orchestra**. **NAVONA RECORDS (NV6055)**

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ON & BETWEEN ZHEN CHEN

US immigrants often live in dualities of cultures and identities. **Zhen Chen's** Navona Records release **ON & BETWEEN** is a musical exploration of these dualities and the accompanying feelings through the sounds of the pipa mingled with Western instruments – poignantly capturing the states of mind of an immigrant on the journey of seeking a home. **NAVONA RECORDS (NV6146)**

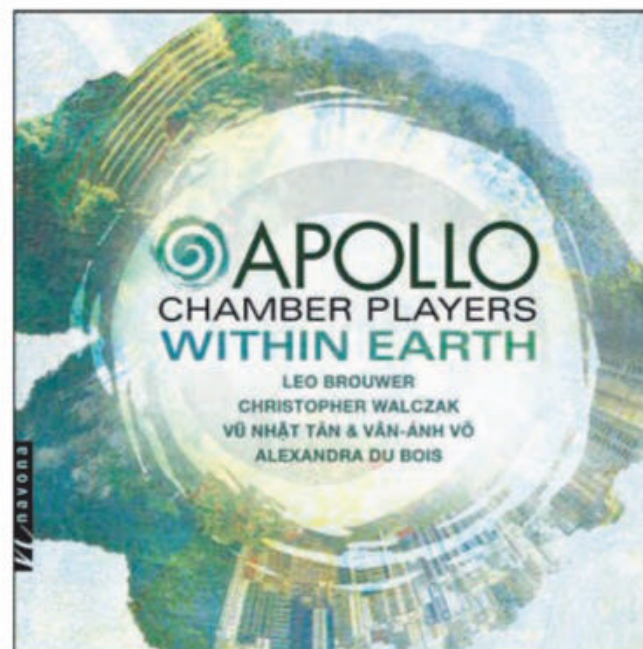
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BETWEEN WORLDS GIOVANNI PIACENTINI

Guitar lovers are in for a treat with **Giovanni Piacentini's** **BETWEEN WORLDS**, a genre-defying exploration of the guitar's expressive power. Composed almost entirely in 2018 and performed by the composer, the music on Navona Records' **BETWEEN WORLDS** serves as a snapshot of a musician's prowess and creative capabilities. **NAVONA RECORDS (NV6224)**

www.giovannipiacentini.com
www.navonarecords.com/catalog/nv6224



WITHIN EARTH APOLLO CHAMBER PLAYERS

On Navona Records' **WITHIN EARTH**, Houston string quartet **Apollo Chamber Players**, described as "...infectious... intimate... provocative... fun..." (*Gramophone Magazine*), presents an album that demonstrates the contemporary possibilities in string music, continuing Apollo's innovative 20x2020 project. **NAVONA RECORDS (NV6262)**

www.apollochamberplayers.org
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Jessica Meyer's music - imaginatively conceived for its range of instruments and voices - makes a lasting impression

This would grace any recital, as would the triptych *Transfiguration*, a clarinet sonata in all but name, which recycles material from other Reale works – a recurrent feature of his output.

Reale is not averse to basing his pieces on other music, too, for example the tune 'Aura lea' in the Oboe Sonata or the 'Dies irae', well submerged in that for bassoon. All the works were composed or, like the Flute Sonata and *Eleven Miniatures* for wind quintet, revised in the latter half of 2017. While each is independent, they could be programmed as a cycle ideally opening with the brief, declamatory *Horn Call* and rounding off with the quintet. (Here, however, the works are played treble to bass, starting with the Flute Sonata, then those for oboe and clarinet, *Horn Call* then the Bassoon Sonata, with the *Miniatures* as coda.) The performances are all exemplary, with Christopher Guzman a near-perfect accompanist to the soloists. Excellent sound, too. **Guy Rickards**

'Playing on the Edge'

Castellano *Images by Paul Klee* **Erickson** *öðlo*
B Field String Quartet No 1 **M Richter** String Quartet No 3 **Tamaki** *sneak into the Q City*
Sirius Quartet
 Navona © NV6249 (52' • DDD)



On the evidence of their playing on this fascinating disc from Navona, the Sirius Quartet are a fine, adaptable ensemble, and contemporary music specialists (judging from their back catalogue on Navona, CRI, Jazz and other labels). Curiously perhaps, the pick of the bunch are the two works with the most conventional titles. Marga Richter may be familiar to collectors for her marvellous tone poem *Blackberry Vines & Winter Fruit* (New World Records – nla). Her music has featured on other discs from Albany and Ravello but the Third Quartet is a fine example of her work, its three movements encapsulating depictions of utter stasis, emotional upheaval and a delightful dance-fantasy finale encompassing a waltz, tango, march and part of a fandango by Soler; and all in under 16 minutes.

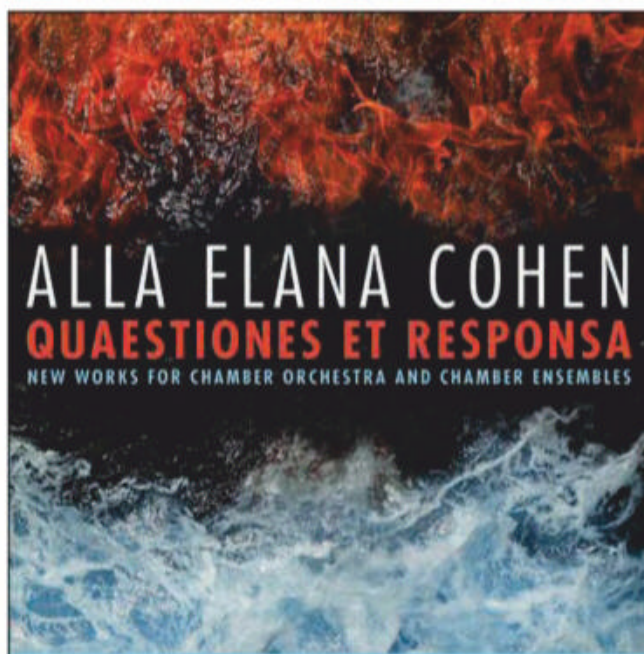
Brian Field was a name new to me, but listening to his brief (14-minute) First Quartet (2003, rev 2010) makes me want to hear more. Its four very rhythmic movements are models of concision, real

dialogues between the four musicians. I warmed less to Ian Erickson's *öðlo*, described as 'an instalment in a five-movement work', from which performers can pick and choose what they play. Jennifer Castellano's *Images by Paul Klee* (2007-08) enters a competitive field, not least with Giseller Klebe's orchestral rival to the opening 'Twittering Machine', but this student, 12-note piece approaches the paintings (the other two are 'Dream City' and 'Fugue in Red') from fresh angles, though arguably is too short to make its presence properly felt. Mari Tamaki's *sneak into the Q City* is also based on a painting, of the same name by Iori Mamiya. Tamaki mirrors the artist's concept of a 'mind trip' with a journey from initial dissonance to a closing, almost saccharine, harmony. Fine performances, fine sound all round.

Guy Rickards

'Preach Sister, Preach'

Bodor *Absent an Adjustment*^a **Mack** *Preach Sister, Preach*^b **E Williams** *Emily's House*^b
Katherine Jolly *sop*^a **Emily Yap Chua** *pf*
^b**Samantha Johnson-Helms** *cl*^b **Christa Cole** *vn*
^b**Rachel Mossburg** *va*^b **Per Björkling** *db*
^b**Joshua Harper** *cond*
 Navona © NV6244 (41' • DDD)



ALLA ELANA COHEN

Questaiones Et Responsa

NEW WORKS FOR CHAMBER ORCHESTRA AND CHAMBER ENSEMBLES

Questaiones Et Responsa

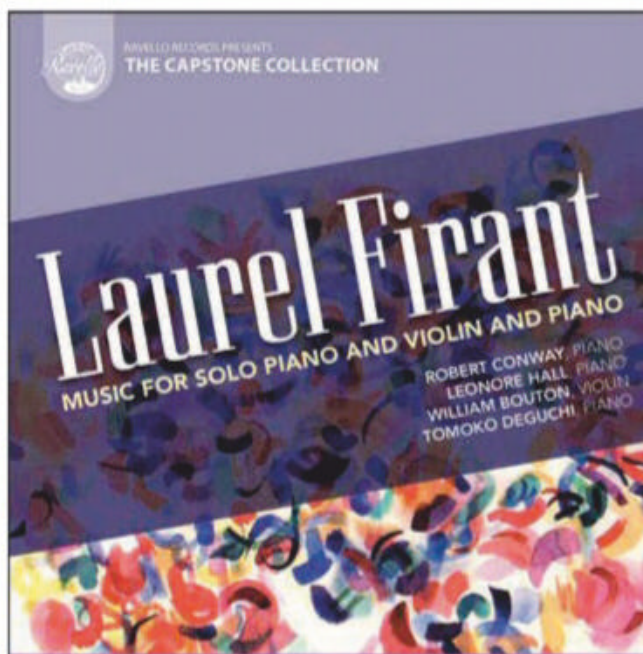
ALLA ELANA COHEN

Russian-born emigrant composer and pianist **Alla Elana Cohen** presents her monumental double album **Questaiones Et Responsa**. Her latest Ravello Records release features chamber works with highly original set-ups and a truly unique musical language. Defying conjectures and conventions, it is nothing less than confident, resolute sophistication.

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Laurel Firant

MUSIC FOR SOLO PIANO AND VIOLIN AND PIANO

ROBERT CONWAY, PIANO
LEONORE HALL, PIANO
WILLIAM BOUTON, VIOLIN
TOMOKO DEGUCHI, PIANO

MUSIC FOR SOLO PIANO AND VIOLIN AND PIANO

LAUREL FIRANT

Laurel Firant's **MUSIC FOR SOLO PIANO AND VIOLIN AND PIANO**, originally released in 2006 on Capstone Records, was lauded as having "distinctive harmonic and melodic language" (IAWM). Re-released on Ravello Records in 2012, this riveting album highlights Laurel Firant as an expert of small ensemble and instrumental composition. **RAVELLO RECORDS (RR7826)**

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HERBERT DEUTSCH

FROM MOOG TO MAC

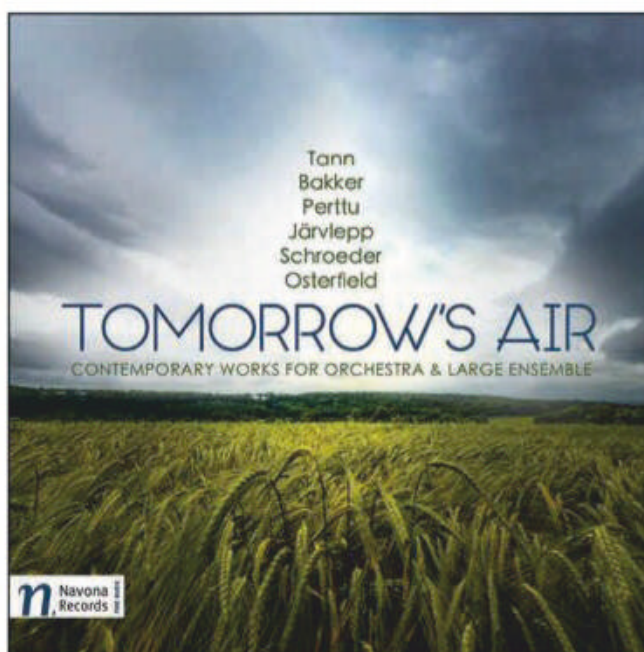
FROM MOOG TO MAC

HERBERT DEUTSCH

While Robert Moog is the regarded inventor of the Moog synthesizer, **Herbert Deutsch** was an invaluable partner in developing the instrument. He composed the first music for the synthesizer and suggested the keyboard interface. Ravello Records' **FROM MOOG TO MAC** is a collection of Deutsch's compositions and performances on the Moog synthesizer spanning the last 30 years.

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www.danielperttu.com

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THE MITTEN

MONA LYN REESE

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MICHAEL KUREK

THE SEA KNOWS

THE SEA KNOWS

MICHAEL KUREK

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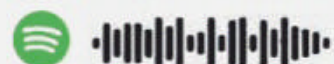
NAVONA RECORDS (NV6111)

www.michaelkurek.com

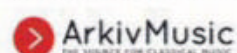
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Katherine Jolly is a rather good operatic and recital soprano, teacher – variously at

St Louis and Indiana Universities and Oberlin Conservatory – and prizewinner. Her career began in earnest in 2006 and she has performed on stage across the United States, from Amarillo and Houston (with the Grand Opera) in Texas to Florida, Virginia and New York.

One of her specialities is coloratura roles, and in her first solo recital disc, one of the works is specifically designed for coloratura soprano: Katherine Bodor's climate change-themed cantata *Absent an*

Adjustment (2018). The text was taken from David Wallace-Wells's controversial 2017 magazine article 'The Uninhabitable Earth' (the title also of a book by the same author, published this year). Bodor – who aligns with Wallace-Wells's gloomy views on climate change – composed *Absent an Adjustment* as 'a call to action: human ingenuity must triumph'. The accompaniment is from clarinet (bizarrely, Navona's documentation with the disc, corrected online, holds that Samantha Johnson-Helms is a violinist), violin, viola and double bass. It is a remarkably contemplative work in places, yet with an urgency that grips the attention.

Absent an Adjustment is the shortest work on the disc, flanked by two song-cycles with piano accompaniment

(superbly played by Emily Yap Chua) setting lighter, at times aphoristic texts. Evan Williams's wistful *Emily's House* (2011) sets 10 brief poems by Emily Dickinson, rather beautifully too, while Evan Mack's *Preach Sister, Preach* (2018) is a sequence of 14 tiny – and often very funny – portraits comprising quotes from some of the West's most iconic women, from Simone de Beauvoir and Mae West to George Eliot, Daphne du Maurier and Ellen de Generis, with two visits to Lucille Ball. It wears its serious purpose lightly, matched by Katherine Jolly's near-ideal interpretation. Something of a find, albeit a little short measure, with excellent sound, too.

Guy Rickards

Benaroya Hall, Seattle

Our monthly guide to North American venues

Year opened 1998

Architect LMN Architects

Capacity S Mark Taper Foundation Auditorium: 2479 seats; Illsley Ball Nordstrom Recital Hall: 536 seats

Resident ensemble Seattle Symphony

Founded in 1903, the Seattle Symphony was already approaching its first centenary before it could claim a custom-built home of its own. The inauguration of Benaroya Hall on September 12, 1998, propelled a major transformation in the orchestra's identity and international reputation.

Occupying an entire block of prime downtown real estate – anchored on either end by a chandelier dyad designed by Dale Chihuly – Benaroya Hall comprises two main concert halls. Together, they host more than 450 public and private events each year and serve dozens of cultural organisations as well as music education programmes (with a total annual attendance of more than 460,000). The 2479-seat S Mark Taper Foundation Auditorium resounds each season with nearly 220 concerts by the Seattle Symphony, which manages but does not own Benaroya Hall. At the opposite end of the complex, in the 536-seat Illsley Ball Nordstrom Recital Hall on the second floor, the Seattle Chamber Music Society presents winter and summer seasons.

A recent development was the unveiling in March 2019 of a third venue – the 150-seat capacity Octave 9: Raisbeck Music Center, which can be reconfigured through state-of-the-art video and audio technology for more experimental endeavours and close-up encounters between visiting composers and performers and Seattle Symphony musicians.

Benaroya Hall offered the Seattle Symphony a desperately needed way out of a dead-end situation. Since the early 1960s, it had shared the Opera House (since renovated), whose poor acoustics and crowded schedule severely limited prospects for growth. The real-estate developer and philanthropist Jack Benaroya and his wife Becky donated \$15 million to seed the building of a new concert hall (total cost: \$118.1 million).



Benaroya Hall opened under the baton of music director Gerard Schwarz (now Conductor Laureate) with a gala programme featuring the late Jessye Norman.

Designed by the Seattle-based firm LMN Architects in collaboration with the acoustician Cyril Harris, Benaroya Hall sits atop a transit station yet is effectively insulated from traffic and urban noise. Indeed, since 2014 the Seattle Symphony has been releasing recordings on the orchestra's in-house label made from its performances here.

Despite its size, the Mark Taper Auditorium radiates a surprising intimacy and warmth, enhanced by the dark wood lining the hall (made from a single African makore tree). With its cylindrical shape and vast windows, the lobby conveys the feeling of looking out over an urban sea from a luxury liner.

A massive Robert Rauschenberg mural welcomes concert-goers, while the signature intermission chimes were composed by David Diamond for the opening. Etched on to the limestone north facade is a quotation from Aaron Copland: 'So long as the human spirit thrives on this planet, music in some living form will accompany and sustain it and give it expressive meaning.'

Thomas May

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– Leonard Bernstein (shouted at a concert)

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"one of the greatest horn players of our time" – Fanfare

Cerninaro has been principal horn with the New York & Los Angeles Philharmonics and Seattle Symphony.

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CD515: CERMINARO PLAYS MOZART Four Horn Concertos. Gerard Schwarz conducting Seattle Symphony Orchestra. *"hallmarks of this recording are refinement, nuance, and Cerninaro's very dark tone quality."* – Amer. Rcd. Guide.



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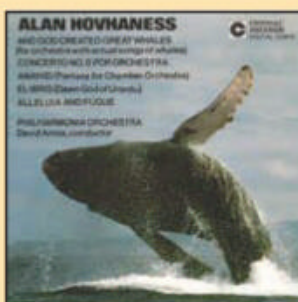
Horn Concerto. National Phil. of London & Israel Philharmonic.

CD803: Majnun Symphony. National Phil. of London. **CD804:** Etchmiadzin Symphony, Fra Angelico, Mountains & Rivers Without End. Royal Philharmonic. **CD801:** All Men Are Brothers (Sym. 11, Royal Philharmonic), Prayer of St. Gregory, Tzaikerk, Armenian Rhapsody No.1. **CD807:** Odysseus Symphony, Celestial Gate, Prayer of St. Gregory. Polyphonia Orchestra. **CD811:** Hovhaness Treasures: his favorite works. Christmas Symphony, Celestial Canticle, Starry Night, etc. Gerard Schwarz & Hovhaness, conductors.

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A LETTER FROM *Boston*

David Allen reports on a thriving music scene dominated by the Boston Symphony and its lauded music director



Bear with me on this one, but the most interesting, indeed the most telling events of the Boston Symphony's season won't feature the Boston Symphony at all. Yes, the audience will still gather under the golden proscenium at Symphony Hall, the orchestra's historic home. Yes, they will still hear pretty much the usual fare: Schubert, Brahms, Mahler, that kind of thing. Yes, they will even see a familiar figure mount the podium. But when Andris Nelsons turns around, the players he will turn to will not be the players they are used to.

The Gewandhausorchester Leipzig arrives in Boston for two concerts at the end of October (concerts that by the time you are reading this will have taken place). Touring orchestras come through town three or four times a year, usually in the Celebrity Series of Boston, but this visit is a bit different: the Leipzigers will be here at the invitation of their Beantown brethren.

It's all part of a formal partnership between the two orchestras. Since 2014 the Latvian conductor, 40, has been the music director of the Boston Symphony, and a committed one at that. Since 2017 he has also held the gaudiest title in music, Gewandhauskapellmeister, a position that Boston encouraged him to take as a way of reducing his workload, the added permanent position replacing guest conducting in far-flung locations. It's hardly unusual for one conductor to have multiple posts, of course: Yannick Nézet-Séguin's services are shared by the Metropolitan Opera, the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Orchestre Métropolitain. But what is unusual is what Boston and Leipzig have made out of the opportunity.

The partnership has several parts. There's a 'Leipzig Week in Boston' and a 'Boston Week in Leipzig', events which showcase the traditions of the partner orchestra, or at least show how far they share a similar tradition. There are co-commissions, including pieces by Jörg Widmann and Sean Shepherd. There are exchanges of musicians and students. There are lectures, archival exhibits and nods to the joint heritage of the orchestras, including the fact that Symphony Hall was based on designs for the second Gewandhaus, destroyed during the Second World War. Most importantly, each orchestra has exactly the time it needs from its chief conductor.

What is it that Nelsons offers Boston? Security, most of all. Symphony Hall is often full. Playing standards are inching upwards, and should continue to do so once the orchestra selects a replacement for Malcolm Lowe, the concertmaster who recently retired after 35 years' service. At its best, this fabled orchestra can still compete with its peers in Chicago and Cleveland. Awards

rightfully greet its recordings, not least the Shostakovich cycle on Deutsche Grammophon.


Recent scandals – the banishment of Charles Dutoit after an investigation into alleged sexual misconduct; the extraordinary pay-discrimination lawsuit filed against the orchestra by its own principal flautist, Elizabeth Rowe, and since settled – appear not to have affected what might outwardly look like serene musical progress.

Outwardly. But as Nelsons enters his sixth season, with more likely to come beyond the notional conclusion of his contract in 2022, I am becoming slightly frustrated. One looks to the excitement in Los Angeles, New York and Seattle with envy. Financially secure, not least because of the revenue provided by summer concerts at Tanglewood, the Symphony seems to be relatively insulated from any of the pressures its peers are facing

to diversify their repertoire, let alone find innovative ways of presenting it. If there are innovations, like music by Florence Price, William Grant Still and others, the

music director is not taking responsibility for them. His concerts have tended to stick to traditional formulae, occasional forays into opera aside. Contemporary music has not been absent, but it has not been celebrated. Big events are in short supply. Even his conducting is a little safe, to my ears; accomplished, certainly, but as averse to risk as the programming itself.

The Symphony dominates music-making in the city, but perhaps it is no coincidence that other ensembles have thrived in recent years. Much the most interesting work is being done by groups led by the conductor Gil Rose, whose Boston Modern Orchestra Project continues to shine in overlooked music from the last century, and whose Odyssey Opera has become adept at unearthing forgotten gems from centuries past. The Boston Lyric Opera still has no permanent home but has drawn notice for performances as far afield as ice rinks and basketball courts. The early-music community remains vibrant, with Blue Heron, Boston Baroque, the Handel and Haydn Society and the Boston Early Music Festival all doing laudable work.

And so with the city's scene as healthy as ever, ears turn back to that colossal hall at the corners of Massachusetts and Huntington Avenues. Is Boston the best fit for Nelsons? Might Leipzig, in fact, be better? The alertness, the drive, the edge that those players contribute, the sheer variety and range of sound they can make, might just give Nelsons's interpretations the vigour they need. A broadcast I heard of Bruckner's Eighth at the Proms suggests as much. October's concerts will tell. 

Nelsons's conducting, to my ears, is a little safe; accomplished, certainly, but as averse to risk as the programming itself

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Pictured: Violinist Janine Jansen (DECCA / © Marco Borggreve) who featured on the January 2016 cover of Gramophone. Full annual retail price for print only (13 issues) is \$142.87; print only annual subscription or Digital Edition or Reviews Database (\$101); Digital Club (\$134); Gramophone Club (\$167). If choosing a print option, an addition overseas P+P charge will be added at \$35.75 (Outside EU). If you have a subscription enquiry then please email subscriptions@markallengroup.com

Celebrating the world's true servants of music

Last week (as I write this) we held our annual *Gramophone* Awards. It would be unbecoming of me to lavish superlatives on our own ceremony, if not for two things: firstly, that this wonderful event is led not by me but by our tireless Editor-in-Chief James Jolly, and secondly, because what makes the event most memorable lies not with us, but with the artists we honour. You can get a flavour of the occasion on page 8, and indeed watch the whole event, thanks to our filming partners Medici TV, on the *Gramophone* website (100,000 people worldwide have already done so). And if you do, you'll encounter moments almost as significant for what they represented as for what they sounded like. One such was when this year's Lifetime Achievement winner Dame Emma Kirkby joined our Young Artist Jakub Józef Orliński to perform a duet from a Bach cantata based on Pergolesi's *Stabat mater*. It will have been lost on no one present that the sort of career this young countertenor is already enjoying is that much richer in opportunity and repertoire because of the passionate advocacy Dame Emma has brought to early music across so many years. That she chose, with her acceptance speech, to deflect attention from herself and refocus it on some of her equally pioneering period colleagues was characteristically humble, and entirely fitting for an artist who, as fellow soprano Catherine Bott put it in her filmed tribute, 'has total integrity'.

That three remarkable pianists – Víkingur Ólafsson (Artist of the Year), Bertrand Chamayou (Recording of the Year winner) and Denis Kozhukhin (signed to our Label of the Year, Pentatone) – performed so



characterfully distinctly reinforced the idea that we have surely entered a golden era when it comes to extraordinary young pianists. To them we can add this month's cover artist, Beatrice Rana. Younger even than the aforementioned, but already playing with a sense of grace and maturity that belies her youth, our interview reveals her to be, like Kirkby, a truly self-effacing, down-to-earth servant of music.

But servants of music can take many forms, as this month's My Music reminds us. I'm struck by how often a My Music interviewee – a well-known person from outside the classical world – recalls the pivotal influence of an otherwise anonymous mentor, someone who spotted a spark of interest and, through encouragement, changed that person's life. Often it's a teacher, and one hopes that there's still space in schools for a more free-form approach to education which allows the expansion of a child's horizons by stepping away from a set curriculum to listen to and discuss music. In Sir Tim Waterstone's case it was the owner of his village's record shop (imagine that today – a village with a record shop!) who gave the empty-pocketed young boy some scratched records to take home. Víkingur Ólafsson has also recalled how he, too, was lent albums by a Reykjavik record store, sparking his lifelong love of recording. In all such cases, the gift – whether of albums, or simply of time – is selflessly given, the only reward being the knowledge that someone is being set on a journey of discovery. In whatever capacity we find ourselves able to do so, let us all pledge to follow likewise in the same spirit.

martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'It was fascinating to talk in-depth with the pianist Beatrice Rana about the programme for her new

Ravel and Stravinsky album,' recalls **HUGO SHIRLEY**. 'I enjoyed learning more about what makes this remarkable young musician tick and how she keeps her feet so firmly planted on the ground.'



'Conducting a conversation with all four members of a string quartet at the same time feels a bit like

becoming a member of the group yourself,' says **RICHARD BRATBY**. 'It was a joy to discover that the Pavel Haas Quartet were as a lively and engaging as interviewees as they are in their music-making.'



'Of all Handel's top-drawer masterpieces, *Samson* is the hardest nut for musicians to crack,' says

DAVID VICKERS who, this issue, interviews conductor John Butt about recording the work. 'Being a fly on the wall when the Dunedin Consort tackled it was as much fun as it was fascinating.'

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Photograph: Coro San Carlo di Pesaro performing Rossini’s ‘Stabat Mater’, Chiesa di San Giovanni in Monte, Bologna, a concert from Martin Randall Festival ‘Music in Bologna’ in 2018. ©Ben Ealovega.



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GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



RECORDING OF THE MONTH



PURCELL
King Arthur
sols; Gabrieli
Consort & Players /
Paul McCreesh
Winged Lion/
Signum ㊦
► **DAVID VICKERS'S
REVIEW IS ON
PAGE 36**

A fascinating opera, one which vividly takes listeners to late 17th-century Britain – Dryden's text and Purcell's music are brought spectacularly and stirringly to life by conductor Paul McCreesh.



FALLA
El amor brujo; El sombrero de tres picos
Mahler CO /
Pablo Heras-Casado
Harmonia Mundi

A centenary celebration of *El sombrero de tres picos*, infused by Pablo Heras-Casado with all the Spanish spirit you could ask for, and an equally outstanding *El Amor brujo*.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 42**



**GERSHWIN.
STRAVINSKY.
VARÈSE**
'Transatlantic'
Cincinnati SO /
Louis Langrée

Fanfare Cincinnati
The Cincinnati Symphony are on sparkling form in two versions, one from a new critical edition, of *An American in Paris*.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 45**



**SCHOENBERG.
WEBER.
ZEMLINSKY**
'The Mathilde Album'
Arod Quartet
Erato

Beautifully played, and recorded, the young Arod Quartet follow their impressive debut with an album of chamber music from the first half of the 20th century.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 58**



'TIME & ETERNITY'
Patricia Kopatchinskaja
vn / Camerata Bern
Alpha
As adventurous in her programming as in

her playing, Patricia Kopatchinskaja offers an album whose meeting of music and words, of eras and traditions, is musically and spiritually powerful.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 63**



ALKAN
Symphony & Concerto
for solo piano
Paul Wee *pf*
BIS
Astonishing virtuosity

defines this hugely impressive recording, whose story behind it – the soloist is a lawyer, not a professional pianist – makes it all the more extraordinary.

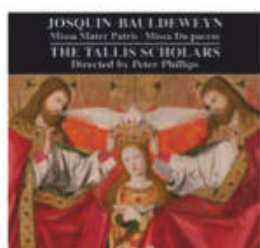
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 66**



RAVEL. STRAVINSKY
Beatrice Rana *pf*
Warner Classics
This month's cover star, the remarkable pianist Beatrice Rana,

is an artist of truly reflective grace; her latest recording, combining poetry and great skill, confirms her as being among the most gifted musicians of her generation.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 69**



**JOSQUIN DESPREZ.
BAULDEWEYN.
BRUMEL**
The Tallis Scholars /
Peter Phillips
Gimell

As it approaches the home straight, The Tallis Scholars' exploration of Josquin offers another fine example of their gift for communicating the composer's music.

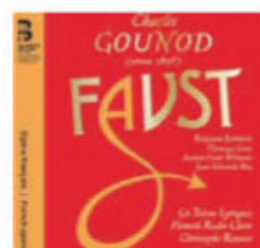
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 81**



HANDEL
Brockes Passion
sols; Academy of
Ancient Music /
Richard Egarr
AAM Records

Much less known than Bach's Passions, this moving meditation on Christ's sacrifice is performed with compelling conviction by the AAM and a superb line-up of soloists.

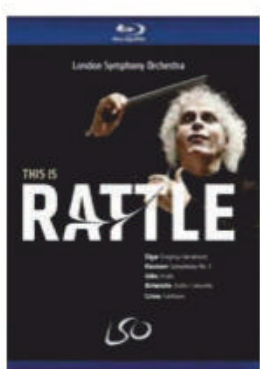
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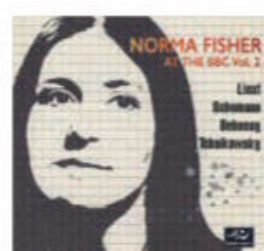
GOUNOD
Faust
sols; Les Talens Lyriques
/ Christophe Rousset
Bru Zane
Another new take

on another otherwise familiar work reveals new dramatic depths; rising star Benjamin Bernheim leads an excellent cast, conducted with flair by Christophe Rousset.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 94**



DVD/BLU-RAY
'THIS IS RATTLE'
London Symphony Orchestra / Sir Simon Rattle
LSO Live
The beginning of Sir Simon Rattle's tenure as the LSO's Music Director, captured on film, bodes impressively well for the years ahead for Londoners.
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 51**



REISSUE/ARCHIVE
'NORMA FISHER AT THE BBC, VOL 2'
Norma Fisher *pf*
Sonetto Classics

The second volume unearthing the early recordings of renowned teacher Norma Fisher once again reveals her to be a pianist of incredible insight, with playing that exudes colour and poetic finesse.

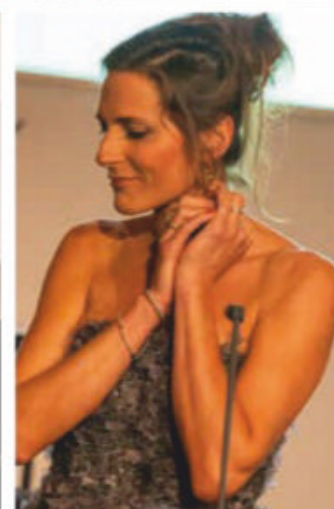
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 74**

FOR THE RECORD



GRAMOPHONE CLASSICAL MUSIC AWARDS 2019

Memorable moments from our ceremony on October 16



Top (clockwise): De Vere Grand Connaught Rooms; Lifetime Achievement winner Dame Emma Kirkby with Young Artist Jakub Józef Orliński; members of guest orchestra Arte dei Suonatori; Delphine Galou singing Vivaldi; Artist of the Year Víkingur Ólafsson; Concept Album winner Sean Shibe; Bolette Roed performing Telemann **Above**: Vox Luminis's Lionel Meunier (Choral); Pedro Álvares Ribeiro collecting the Early Award for Cupertinoos; Anu Komsa (Orchestral); Birgit Nilsson Foundation President Rutbert Reisch (Special Achievement); the evening's presenter, Editor-in-Chief James Jolly; YS Liu, Hong Kong Philharmonic Chairman (Orchestra of the Year); cellist Jean-Guihen Queyras (Chamber); Bertrand Chamayou, Concerto and Recording of the Year winner **Right**: Denis Kozhukhin, representing Label of the Year, Pentatone



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Giltburg launches Beethoven 32 project



Challenge: Boris Giltburg to learn all 32 sonatas

While many musicians are exploring Beethoven's music for the composer's 250th anniversary year, few are doing so with quite the comprehensive embrace of Boris Giltburg. The pianist has launched a new website, beethoven32.com, to host a project that will see him learn, in chronological order, all 32 piano sonatas at regular intervals during 2020, filming and sharing the process as it unfolds. He'll also add supplementary material documenting his own journey of discovery, and detailing the daily challenges and obstacles in learning these pinnacles of the piano repertoire.

Meanwhile, Giltburg is also embarking on a recording of Beethoven's five piano concertos, again for Naxos, with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and Vasily Petrenko.

The first album, of the first two concertos plus the

early Rondo, WoO6 from 1793, is reviewed on page 39, and Giltburg spoke about the project on a *Gramophone* Podcast, which you can find at gramophone.co.uk/podcast

ASMF marks 60 years with box-set

The Academy of St Martin in the Fields is marking its 60th anniversary by releasing a 60-CD box-set on Decca, featuring many acclaimed recordings by its founder Neville Marriner as well as by today's Music Director Joshua Bell (both as violinist and conductor). One of the most prolific of recording ensembles throughout its existence, the ASMF will next year embark on tours of the US in February, and of Europe in both January and May, the first with pianist Fazıl Say, the later one with pianist Murray Perahia. Watch out for our interview with Joshua Bell in the January issue.

ONE TO WATCH

Sandro Nebieridze Piano

The first pianist he has reviewed who was born in the 21st century, writes our critic Jeremy Nicholas of Sandro Nebieridze. But such youth, as he goes on to argue in his review on page 69 of this issue, in no way prevents his performance of Prokofiev's Piano Sonata No 4 from being one 'that can hold its head high among stiff competition'. It's one highlight among an impressive debut album from the 18-year-old pianist from Tbilisi, which features other works by Prokofiev, including four of the *Ten Pieces from Romeo And Juliet*, and several works by Rachmaninov, his Second Sonata among them.

Listening to the album reveals an artist who already sounds entirely at home in the studio; a supporting promotional video sees him discussing the process of recording with a thoughtful awareness of what it can achieve. He's also someone who plays with a strong sense of emotional engagement. Impressive virtuosity, meanwhile, is a given for any artist invited to grace Harmonia Nova, Harmonia Mundi's series devoted to unveiling exceptional young talent, others of whom have also appeared in our One to Watch slot



(and which, incidentally, in an earlier guise, helped launch the recording career of Isabelle Faust). And while he's not the only young pianist to be able to boast a number of First Prizes to his name, not many artists can also add to those awards others for composition as well. As well as music for solo piano, Sandro has also written a string quartet, a chamber opera and a piano concerto. 'We shall doubtless be hearing a lot more from Nebieridze,' concludes JN, to which we could add 'in more ways than one'.

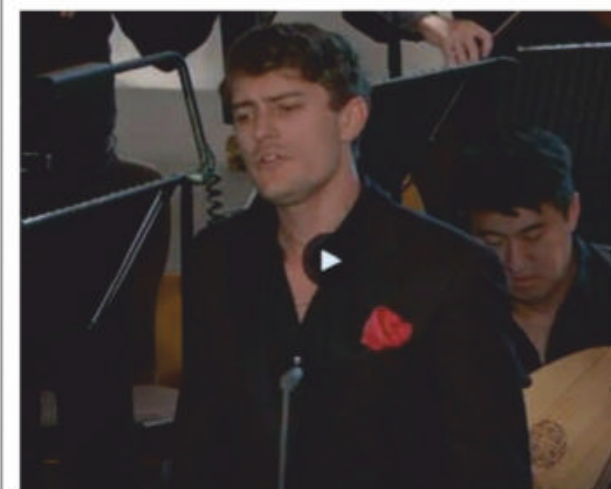
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JESSYE NORMAN REMEMBERED

Mark Pullinger reflects on the late American singer's formidable – and unforgettable – career

'Her breath seems almost endless at times, her tone refulgent and full ... I doubt if the *Vier letzte Lieder* have sounded so rich in texture since Flagstad,' wrote Alan Blyth in his *Gramophone* review of Jessye Norman's 1983 Philips recording of Richard Strauss's *Four Last Songs* (it won a *Gramophone* Award the following year). It's a recording adored by many, making frequent appearances in Desert Island Discs selections on BBC Radio 4, although it has its detractors, not least because of the way Kurt Masur drags out the tempos. It reveals Norman's soprano at its mighty peak: a plush sound, highly polished, almost sculpted from marble. On receiving the news of her death on September 30, aged 74, many of us immediately reached for that very same recording.

Jessye Mae Norman was born in Augusta, Georgia, in 1945 (still a time of great segregation for African-Americans), the third of five children born to insurance salesman Silas Norman and his wife Janie, a schoolteacher. It was an aspiring, musical family; her mother was an amateur pianist and her father sang in the Baptist church choir, where Norman sang gospel songs

from the age of four. She was intrigued by a harmonium in her grandparents' house – 'the most exotic thing I had ever encountered in my entire life' – and learnt to play the piano. In interviews, she described receiving the present of a radio on her ninth birthday which introduced her to opera via the weekly Met matinee broadcasts, and being entranced by *Lucia di Lammermoor*. She became an avid listener, recounting the opera plots she encountered to her class the following Monday.

Norman's talent was picked up at school and she was given vocal coaching by Rosa Sanders, who enrolled her into the Marian Anderson Vocal Competition in Philadelphia when she was just 16. She didn't win, but she did meet Anderson's sister, who offered encouragement. On the return journey, they called in at Howard University, Washington DC, where Sanders suggested Norman audition for the renowned vocal coach Carolyn Grant; Grant was so impressed that she awarded Norman a full scholarship.

After graduating in 1967, Norman studied at the Peabody Conservatory (Baltimore) and the University of Michigan,

where she worked with baritone Pierre Bernac. In the 1968 Metropolitan Opera National Council's auditions, Norman won \$500 which enabled her to travel to Europe, where she won Bavarian Radio's International Music Competition.

Egon Seefehlner, Intendent at Deutsche Oper Berlin, heard her sing Elisabeth's prayer from *Tannhäuser* and offered the soprano the role for her operatic debut in 1969. It was a surreal moment for Norman, as she recalled, 'an African-American singing a quintessential Wagner role in a German opera house'. It became even more surreal because, after Act 2, Seefehlner visited Norman's dressing room and immediately offered her a three-year contract with the company. Her stint in Berlin gave her time to perfect her art and learn German, essential for all the Wagner and Strauss she was to sing during her career.

Norman's Berlin contract allowed her to accept engagements around Europe. In 1972, she made her La Scala and Royal Opera debuts as Aida and Cassandre (in *Les Troyens*) respectively. The latter was under Colin Davis, who was already a great champion of her work, having engaged her to sing at the Last Night of the Proms in both 1971 and 1972 and also to perform the Countess in his

Philips recording of *Le nozze di Figaro*. Her Covent Garden Cassandre was a triumph, prompting the headline in *The Times*, 'Troy falls. Norman conquers'. Critic Stanley Sadie wrote that Norman 'sang wonderfully well, with a perfectly tuned, dead steady, but properly vibrant tone, full and taut yet also velvety, with some ringing chest notes'.

Norman knew how to pace her career. As a black American, she was following in the footsteps of Leontyne Price, Grace Bumbry and Shirley Verrett, but whereas they largely sang Italian repertoire, Norman concentrated more on German and French works. She knew she was young for the heavy Wagner and Strauss roles and so, in 1975, she moved to London and eschewed opera for five years, focusing instead on improving her vocal technique and developing her song repertoire.

America was slow on the uptake. In this respect, Norman knew that basing herself in Germany was absolutely the right thing to have done. In 1973, she told the *New York Times*: 'If I hadn't gone to Europe I'd be beating my brains out right now in New York, working as a waitress and running around to the [music] foundations.' Norman wasn't to make her American operatic debut until 1982 when she starred in Opera Philadelphia's double bill of *Dido and Aeneas* with *Oedipus Rex*. Her belated Metropolitan Opera debut came in 1983 as Cassandre in *Les Troyens*, opening the company's 100th anniversary season. A couple of Didons followed, including, in 1984, a dramatic step-in for Tatiana Troyanos for the final act of *Les Troyens*, having already sung Cassandre earlier in the evening. Other pinnacles of her career included Ariadne and Sieglinde.

Honours and invitations followed. She sang at the second presidential inaugurations of Ronald Reagan (1985) and Bill Clinton (1997), and performed in the opening ceremony of the 1996 Olympic Games in her hometown, Atlanta. And when she was invited by President Mitterand to sing *La Marseillaise* in Paris on the 200th anniversary of Bastille Day, she appeared wearing a spectacular tricolour cape designed by Azzedine Alaïa. More sombrely, Norman sang Schubert's *Ave Maria* at the funeral of Jacqueline Kennedy in 1994, and, at the 2001 memorial service for the victims of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center's twin towers, she performed *America the Beautiful*.

She was as much at home on the concert platform as on the operatic stage, and embraced 'crossover', even though she dismissed the term as sounding 'like an uncomfortable bra'. She happily sang Gershwin, Cole Porter and American spirituals with equal joy.

Jessye Norman's recorded legacy is not vast in terms of complete operas. If forced to pick just one of her roles represented on disc, I'd plump for her glorious Ariadne (with Kurt Masur and the Gewandhaus, the same forces as on that *Four Last Songs* disc). But she is also fabulous as Sieglinde on James Levine's Met Opera *Walküre* (DG) and as Elsa on Georg Solti's *Lohengrin*, with Plácido Domingo in the title role. In addition, her recordings of *Erwartung* (Levine), and *Salome* and *Oedipus Rex* (Seiji Ozawa), stand up well, as does her Leonore in *Fidelio* (Haitink), a role she never sang on stage, recorded in Dresden weeks after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Norman featured in a couple of Philips's early Verdi series (*Il corsaro* and *Un giorno di regno*). Her Mozart Countess with Colin Davis may be a bit stately for modern tastes, but it's luscious singing all the same. Her Carmen was a bad misfire


though – unsexy, sometimes slipping south of the note, sluggishly conducted by Ozawa. And she didn't have the verismo bite for Santuzza in *Cavalleria rusticana* (Bychkov).

It's rumoured that she recorded *Elektra* with Abbado and the Vienna Philharmonic, but – ever the perfectionist – vetoed its release, as she did some 'bleeding chunks' from *Tristan* (in which she sang both Isolde and Brangäne).

Sadly, Norman did not record Berlioz's *Les Troyens*, but her Cléopâtre with Daniel Barenboim and the Orchestre de Paris is magisterial. Apart from the *Four Last Songs*, Norman's essential non-operatic recordings include the *Wesendonck-Lieder*, a Boston Symphony *Gurrelieder*, and a Brahms *Alto Rhapsody* with Riccardo Muti and the Philadelphia Orchestra (all Philips). Among her recital discs, her Brahms Lieder with Barenboim (DG) is treasurable, as is a French disc, again on Philips, of Duparc, Poulenc and Satie with Dalton Baldwin.

Norman wasn't one to suffer fools gladly and could live up to her diva status. Humour could be lacking. It was reported that when she once got stuck in a revolving door, someone suggested she turn sideways to free herself. 'Honey, I ain't got no sideways!' she retorted – an amusingly self-deprecating response, you'd think, except that Norman denies she ever said it. She filed a libel case against *Classic CD* magazine for publishing the story, claiming it had conformed to a 'degrading, racist stereotype of a person of African-American heritage'. The case was thrown out.

On being interviewed by Stephen Sackur on the BBC's *HARDtalk*, she was asked about something a critic had written. 'Oh darling,' she exclaimed. 'They might write it, but I don't read it! I don't need to.' There was little love lost between her and the critics. Rupert Christiansen delivered a damning one-star review of her memoir *Stand Up Straight and Sing!* in *The Telegraph* in 2014, recounting what sounds a car-crash interview: 'She appears to have thought me jumped-up and impertinent; I found her pompous and condescending.' He dismissed the book as an 'exercise in auto-hagiography'.

Norman's best interview line – she claimed it was the only clever thing she'd ever said in her life – was in response to being asked what sort of soprano she was. 'Pigeonholes', she replied, 'are only comfortable for pigeons.' 

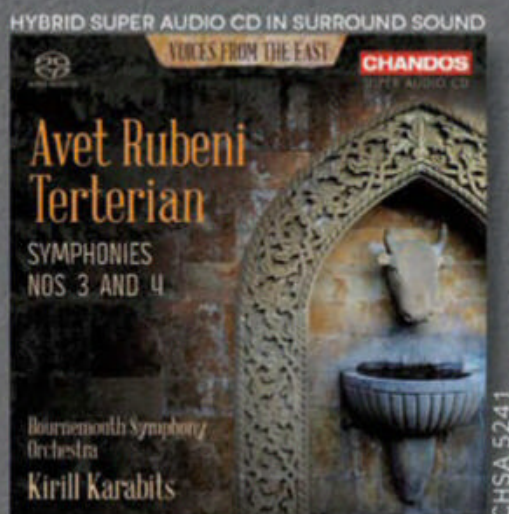
Jessye Norman: born September 15, 1945; died September 30, 2019

NOVEMBER RELEASES



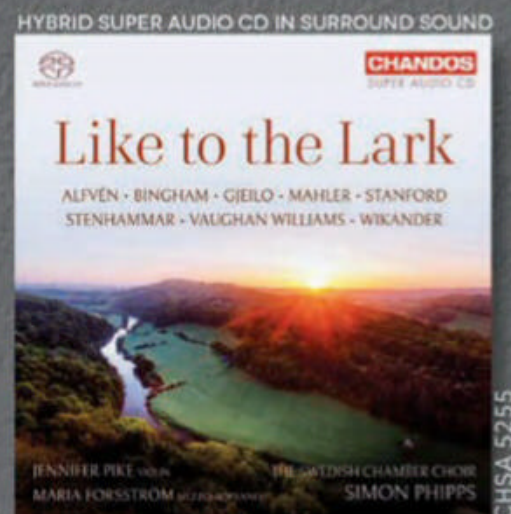
SIR ARTHUR BLISS
MARY OF MAGDALA
THE ENCHANTRESS
Dame Sarah Connolly | James Platt
BBC Symphony Orchestra & Chorus
Sir Andrew Davis

Sir Andrew Davis continues his championship of the lesser-known works of Sir Arthur Bliss.



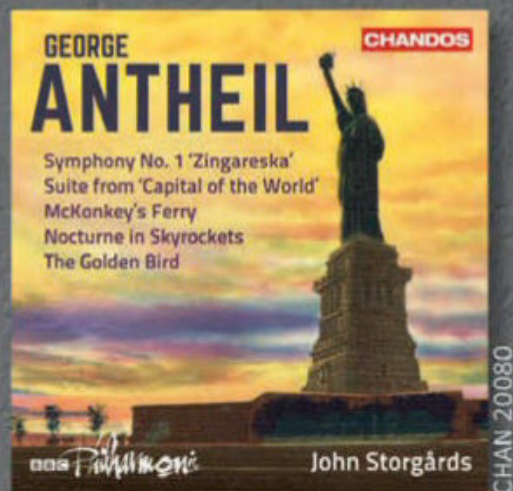
AVET RUBENI TERTERIAN
SYMPHONIES 3 & 4
Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra
Kirill Karabits

Armenian composer Terterian's third and fourth symphonies were written in the mid-1970's. Kirill Karabits and the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra make a compelling case for these rarely performed works.



LIKE TO THE LARK
Jennifer Pike | Maria Forsström
Swedish Chamber Choir
Simon Phipps

Jennifer Pike joins the Swedish Chamber Choir for a fascinating programme of works for Choir and Violin, which includes O Magnum Mysterium by Ola Gjeilo and Vaughan Williams' Lark Ascending.



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ORCHESTRAL WORKS VOL. 3
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The third volume in this series of the music of George Antheil includes his 'Capital of the World' Suite and the first symphony.



THE SYMPHONIC EUPHONIUM VOL. II
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Ben Gernon

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TCHAIKOVSKY PLUS ONE
VOL. 2
Barry Douglas

For his second album in this series, Barry Douglas couples Tchaikovsky's Grande Sonata with Rachmaninov's Six Moments Musicaux.

GRAMOPHONE GUIDE TO *The motet*

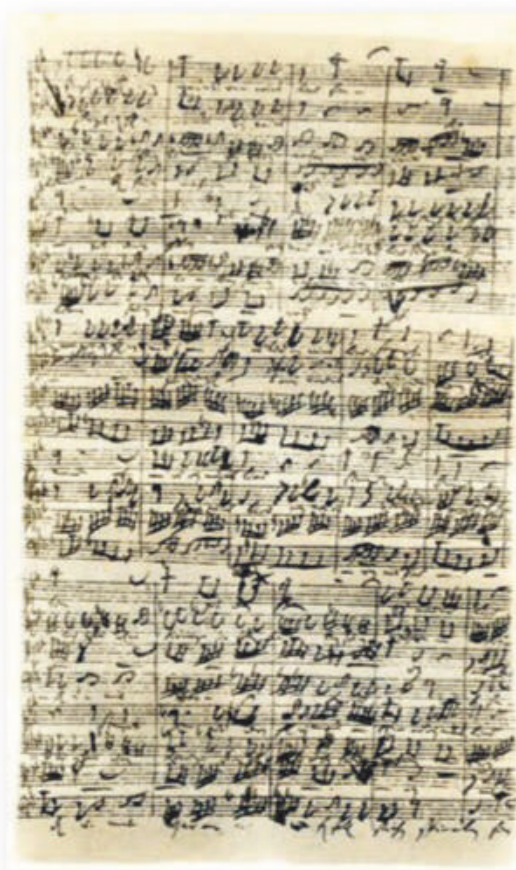
Lindsay Kemp focuses on the rich history of one of the oldest sacred vocal genres

The motet has been with us for as long as, perhaps longer than, any other named musical genre except the Mass. And for most of its eight centuries of existence, the term has meant pretty much the same thing: a piece of sacred vocal music that is not in the liturgy but can be part of a service, and is usually in Latin, usually polyphonic and usually unaccompanied. It originated in France in the 13th century, when short sections of plainchant (clausulas) might be troped with upper parts to new words (*mots*) in Latin or French; when the clausulas also began to acquire their own words, motetus became the term for the piece as a whole. The mainly anonymous motets from medieval England and France thus often carry more than one text at a time.

The great motet composer of the 14th century was Machaut, who used isorhythms (the technique of overlapping, non-synchronised rhythmic patterns) as a constructional principle. A century later, handsome motets by composers such as Dunstaple and Du Fay were using isorhythms in all voices.

By the end of the 15th century the motet had simplified to a freer and more unified choral form constructed from imitative counterpoint and with a single text, as in the supremely polished motets of Josquin. From there, the polyphonic motet flowered as the 16th century progressed, reaching a high point of elegance in the hands of giants such as Palestrina, Lassus, Victoria and Byrd.


The Baroque era brought greater freedom. Around 1600, Giovanni Gabrieli made instrumental richness an essential element of his motets for St Mark's in Venice, and Schütz took



Bach's score for his motet 'Singet dem Herrn'

that style to Germany. And while the essential function of the motet remained, its form now diversified: in Catholic countries, motets often consciously adhered to a version of Renaissance choral polyphony (*stile antico*), but they also began to appear in a variety of vocal and instrumental combinations, from one or two voices with basso continuo (Monteverdi, Couperin), to single voice and orchestra (Vivaldi, Handel; and later Mozart), to imposing *grands motets* for soloists, chorus and orchestra

written for the French royal chapel by Lully and Lalande.

In Lutheran Germany, motets could be based on chorale melodies and texts, as in Bach's six superb examples (which inspired Mendelssohn and Brahms). Yet the genre remained associated primarily with the Latin church, and the motets of Bruckner and Verdi in their separate ways share a southern European ardency. The conservative prescriptions of Pope Pius X laid a staying hand on expressive development in the 20th century, but figures such as Poulenc and Messiaen still achieved considerable beauty. In Britain (where the Anglican church found a functional equivalent for it in the anthem), the motet has mainly been the preserve of Catholic composers such as Rubbra and James MacMillan. 

IN THE STUDIO

● Soprano **Anna Lucia Richter** is heading to the Swiss Radio Studios in Lugano, Switzerland, to record an album for Pentatone. The recording, to take place in January 2020, is being supported by the Borletti-Buitoni Trust (she received a BBT Award in 2016) and will feature the music of Monteverdi. Richter will be joined in the studio by Ensemble Claudiana under lutenist Luca Pianca, co-founder of Il Giardino Armonico. The recording will be released next autumn.

● Another 2016 BBT artist, the Norwegian viola player **Eivind Ringstad**, is this month heading to the UK with the pianist David Meier for Rubicon Classics. Featuring repertoire by Arthur Benjamin, Hindemith, Enescu, Vieuxtemps and Ysaÿe, the recording has as its highlight *Correspondances* by Peder Barratt-Due, from which the album takes its title; the work was commissioned for Ringstad by the BBC when he was a New Generation Artist. The album is out in October next year.

● Two Orfeo sessions are in the pipeline for the end of this month, with both recordings due out next June. The first sees violinist **Baiba Skride** heading to the Örebro Konserthus, Sweden, to join the Swedish Chamber Orchestra under Elvind Aadland to record Mozart's

Violin Concertos Nos 1 to 5. The recording will be Skride's ninth album for Orfeo, and builds on her recent Bartók collaboration with conductor Aadland, just out on Naxos. The second session sees male soprano **Samuel Marino** making his debut for the label with Handel and Gluck (including two world premieres). He'll be joined at Germany's Volkspark Halle by the Händel-Festpielorchester Halle under Michael Hofstetter.

● The Belgian-American pianist **Tedd Joselson** is at Abbey Road next month to record *Fantasy of Companionship* for piano and orchestra, a new work by Manu Martin that explores pioneering surgeon Dr Susan Lim's concept of companionship between an inanimate object and a human. Joselson will be joined by the LSO, London Voices and conductor Arthur Fagen of Atlanta Opera. The release is due in 2020.

● In July, the **Tatarstan National Symphony Orchestra** under Alexander Sladkovsky recorded Tchaikovsky's complete symphonies and concertos (including the original edition of the Second Piano Concerto) for Sony Classical. They were joined in Kazan by soloists including the pianist Boris Berezovsky. The box-set is due out next spring to coincide with the 180th anniversary of the composer's birth.

ORCHESTRA *Insight ...*

Borusan Istanbul Philharmonic Orchestra

Our monthly series telling the story behind an orchestra

Founded 1999

Home Borusan Music House, Istanbul

Artistic Director / Principal Conductor Sascha Goetzel

Honorary Conductor Gürer Aykal

It sits on the edge of Europe and remains a baby in orchestral terms, yet the Borusan Istanbul Philharmonic Orchestra has reminded us how valuable and malleable the thing we call 'tradition' really is. As it prepares to enter its third decade, the BIPO can be credited with injecting vital new impulses into staples of the repertoire while posing creative answers to the perennial question of how re-recording those works can be justified.

But this orchestra's singular spirit, as well as its primary *raison d'être*, comes from its home town at the crossroads of West and East. Since 1999, when it was established by augmenting a chamber orchestra founded by the Borusan conglomerate six years earlier, the BIPO has provided residents on the European and Anatolian sides of Istanbul with their first opportunity to hear regular symphonic concerts.

After 10 years and a considered recruitment programme, the BIPO welcomed a new artistic director straight from classical music's heartland. Sascha Goetzel, a Viennese musician from a family of Viennese musicians (and a former Vienna Philharmonic violinist), was precisely what the BIPO needed: a charismatic leader and a musician whose umbilical connection to the heart of the 'tradition' would prove the perfect complement to the orchestra's existence outside it.

It has been fascinating to watch what Goetzel has done. He has trained his quality ensemble on Mahler symphonies and Strauss operas while making sure it knows it exists to entertain (it is no stranger to New Year concerts). He clearly relishes the unusual sound of his orchestra – its sensuality, bright colours and brazen edge – while exploring its Turkish



nationality (95 per cent of members are Turkish) with astute repertoire decisions that have recalibrated ideas of 'Western' and 'Eastern' in music.

Luckily for those of us outside Turkey, this has been well documented on record. Almost all the BIPO's home-grown recordings for Onyx have explored the influence of the eastern side of the Bosphorus on Western composers and vice versa. They can just as easily pass as excellent and individual accounts of established masterpieces by Rimsky-Korsakov (*Sheherazade*), Hindemith (*Symphonic Metamorphoses*) Bartók (*The Miraculous Mandarin*) and more.

Yes, this is a classy orchestra whatever the repertoire, with excellent principals and a sound culture of its own that has valuable things to say. Its recordings may be made above a BMW garage in Istanbul, but they are good enough for Deutsche Grammophon, which has now released the same number of BIPO titles as Onyx. Live, the BIPO doesn't disappoint either, as anyone present at its 2014 BBC Proms debut will testify.

Andrew Mellor

Lars Vogt: Paris bound

Lars Vogt has been appointed Music Director of the Orchestre de chambre de Paris – the ensemble which has just won the Opera category in this year's *Gramophone* Awards for its recording of Halévy's *La reine de Chypre* under Hervé Niquet. From July 1 next year, the conductor and pianist, now in his final year as Music Director at the Royal Northern Sinfonia, will take over from Douglas Boyd, who has led the ensemble since 2015.

New Takács line-up

Few quartets so consistently earn acclaim for their recordings as the Takács Quartet, and indeed, on page 56 of this very issue, Michelle Assay praises their most recent album of



Lars Vogt to join the Orchestre de chambre de Paris

music by Dohnányi. Now in their 45th year, the Colorado-based ensemble have just announced a line-up change: viola player Geraldine Walther is leaving after 15 years, to be replaced in June by Richard O'Neill.

Gheorghiu celebrates

Angela Gheorghiu, one of today's pre-eminent soprano stars and five-time *Gramophone* Award-winner, is marking 25 years since her debut recording with a new album of rare and classic songs never previously recorded by her. Called 'Plaisir d'amour', and performed with pianist Alexandra Dariescu, repertoire ranges from Fauré to Strauss via Villa-Lobos and Rachmaninov. It will be released by Decca on November 15.

FROM WHERE I SIT

A majestic voice and a huge personality with an inimitable dress sense to boot, Jessye Norman will be greatly missed, says our columnist Edward Seckerson



Jessye Norman – gone but never forgotten, her majestic voice for the ages forever enshrined for posterity in countless recordings, her aura somehow immortal. I saw her perform many times, I sat in on recording sessions, I exchanged opinions – sometimes candidly – in one or two memorable interviews. She always made an entrance. I remember visiting her tiny house in Belgravia, hearing that immaculate speaking voice of honey and molasses – distinctive even through the tinny entry-phone – and entering an empty ground floor to await her arrival down a central spiral staircase. She arrived beautifully attired, replete with turban, a galleon in full sail. It was a Norma Desmond moment. She was definitely ready for her close-up.

Norman was intimidating but charming. Serious questions would get serious answers. Music was a serious matter. But she could be playful, too. Her generous laugh would rock the neighbourhood. I remember her scrutinising the tape recorder I placed between us at that interview in London and asking: ‘Is this the same machine?’ Simon Rattle had told her the story of my being mugged in a friend’s apartment in Los Angeles and how the burglar had heeded my plea not to take the recorder. It contained a taped interview with Renata Scotto. If ever there was a breaking-the-ice moment that was it. We got on famously.

That her voice was one in a million is undeniable: the amplitude, the sheer girth and mellifluousness of the sound throughout the range. I always believed that Jessye Norman was fundamentally a mezzo but with a reach that opened her

up to the soprano repertoire and gave us so much more to remember her by. Her enunciation and projection of words (especially in Lieder) could be more than a little ‘arch’. She was inescapably ‘grand’ whatever she sang. And she should never have ventured into popular song and jazz. She could never be that colloquial. My scathing review, in this very magazine (September 2010 issue), of her Berlin Jazz concert has attained some notoriety.

But back to the vocal wonders she wove in a composer like Richard Strauss. Her famous account of the *Four Last Songs* (with Kurt Masur) is unrivalled in opulence and splendour, ‘Im Abendrot’ majestically slow, positively eternal. Or her Ariadne in Strauss’s *Ariadne auf Naxos* – essentially playing herself, diva and goddess. And who can ever forget her concerts of the Immolation Scene from Wagner’s *Götterdämmerung* or better yet Isolde’s Liebestod with Karajan – goddess and god conjoined.

But that brings me to the one aspect of her talent that cannot easily be put into words. I’ll try. Her magnificent pride in who she was. Her regality, her bearing, her *presence*. She was a star in every sense of the word; she encouraged, indeed positively demanded, the adoration she received from her public. When she was on stage – even before a note was sounded – she transformed the atmosphere, she changed the way the air moved in the room. To this day I can see and hear her slowly rise to address the ‘Urlicht’ in Mahler’s Second Symphony, Claudio Abbado on the podium. Requiescat.

ARTISTS & *their* INSTRUMENTS

Patrick Wibart on his serpent designed by Swiss maker Stephan Berger

“The serpent was invented in France during the second half of the 16th century. If it didn’t have so many curves it would be 2.2 metres long! It used to be played in religious vocal music, and also instrumental music, to strengthen the bass line. It was later employed in orchestral and chamber music, eventually extending its reach across Europe in the second half of the 18th century, as witness the scores of Haydn and Beethoven. From the 19th century, it was gradually replaced by the ophicleide and then by the tuba.

But it’s important to understand that the serpent is not a brass instrument – it’s a hybrid instrument, requiring both woodwind- and brass-playing techniques. The sounds are completely realised with the lips; the finger holes only serve to allow the instrument to vibrate (expanding the range far beyond the military trumpet’s five-note capability). But above all, the flexibility required to play the serpent is very close to vocal technique. Indeed, I was a singer in the Radio France Children’s Choir and it was only when my voice broke at the age of 14 that I took up the tuba. A few years later, when I was studying tuba at the Paris Conservatoire, I discovered the serpent – I was able to play Baroque music again!



My serpent was designed for me by the Swiss maker Stephan Berger. It is made of walnut wood covered with vellum parchment; the mouthpiece comes from cow horn, and the lacquer uses herbal resin harvested by Stephan in Switzerland; the glue was made with milk from a nearby farm. It also has a little gold ring engraved with Baroque motifs and an excerpt from Psalm 118 by a goldsmith friend of mine. The purity of historical craftsmanship has been preserved but at the same time has been adapted so that I can use my instrument to play modern repertoire.

Benjamin Attahir is one of my closest friends and last year he had the idea of reworking his earlier chamber concerto for the serpent – exploring the parallels between the role of the serpent in the Catholic liturgy and the muezzin’s call to prayer – into a much larger piece. In *Adh-Dhor* his mastery of the orchestra and sense of drama are wonderful for me, the soloist, to interpret.

I hope that my instrument will re-establish its role in the Baroque music it inspired. It is time that musicians appreciated its true value.”
‘Adh-Dor’, with Wibart and the Orchestre National de Lille / Alexandre Bloch, is, alongside music by Ravel, released in November on Alpha



A touch of GENIUS

For the remarkably focused yet perfectly ‘normal’ Italian pianist Beatrice Rana, music programmes are journeys. She tells Hugo Shirley about following the path of Ravel and Stravinsky

Beatrice Rana seems in many ways the epitome of the modern musician. Still just 26, she combines technical brilliance (her debut on Warner Classics coupled Tchaikovsky’s First Piano Concerto with Prokofiev’s super-virtuoso Second) and intelligence with a refreshingly no-nonsense professionalism. There’s steely determination and clearly no shortage of ambition – without which such achievements as hers would be impossible. But she’s also strikingly, well, normal: as she arrives for our interview in the Warner Classics offices in Paris she comes across as straightforwardly and genuinely friendly and personable.

She’s just flown in from Rome, where she now lives, and with barely a pause we are ushered into a meeting room to start talking. No ceremony, no faff, no fluster about us already being behind schedule – she’s as cool as a cucumber. It brings to mind the previous occasion we met. I was invited to catch the end of her recording sessions for Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* at Berlin’s Teldex Studio. By the time I’d arrived, though, she’d already finished and was using the remaining time to shoot – calmly, professionally – trailer videos for the release.

Rana’s *Goldberg Variations* earned an Editor’s Choice in these pages (4/17), as did that earlier coupling of Russian concertos with Antonio Pappano conducting his Orchestra dell’Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia (12/15). And more recently, Pappano’s set of the Bernstein symphonies, on which Rana tackles the eclectic piano part of the Second (*The Age of Anxiety*), was Recording of the Month (9/18). ‘She has the razzle-dazzle in spades,’ wrote Edward Seckerson of the pianist’s contribution, ‘but it is the mercurial throwaway manner ... that really excites.’ For her new album she stays in the 20th century, looking to its turbulent early decades with a programme that calls on those same playing qualities, and more.

Intriguingly, though, three of the four works included were not originally composed for the piano. Ravel’s *Miroirs* is

juxtaposed with the composer’s own piano version of his ‘poème chorégraphique’ *La valse*; and Stravinsky is represented by music from two of his ballets: the composer’s own fearsome *Three Movements from Petrushka* and Guido Agosti’s virtuosic arrangement of the ‘Danse infernale’, Berceuse and finale from *The Firebird*.

‘There are so many reasons why I decided to do the programme,’ she explains when I ask about her choices. ‘First of all, I’ve always been fascinated by the piano literature from the beginning of the 20th century. It’s a period of great change, and every composer elaborates this in a very personal vocabulary of sounds.’ The repertoire on the album, she argues, reflects

‘I’ve always loved Ravel’s music, especially the way he describes something very precisely but also with great ambiguity’

a ‘big period of crisis’, particularly *La valse* (1920). ‘Here you have the explanation of what’s going on at the time. It’s written as a prediction, even though it’s the last of the four pieces to be composed. It’s a description of society in collapse, of that time when, especially in a city like Paris, everything was happening so fast. Ravel had arrived there as a French Basque; Stravinsky had arrived from Russia and, with the Ballets Russes, completely changed the cultural life of the city.’

It was *Miroirs* (1905), however, that was the starting point. ‘I’ve been playing *Miroirs* in concert for a long time and have always loved Ravel’s music, to listen to and to play – especially the way he describes something very precisely but also with great ambiguity. Even with this early work he’s experimenting. It’s not just descriptive; for example, “Une barque sur l’océan” is not just about a boat on the ocean, it’s also about the light on the ocean, a new concept of music inspired by images.’ Although ‘Impressionist’ is a much contested label, I suggest, one can understand why people use the term. ‘Yes, but the writing is also so crystalline. It’s like a Swiss clock, with every detail in the music, but at the same time it’s like water: there’s so much depth.’

I get the impression that Rana feels the links between the works as much instinctively as intellectually. ‘I always think of



Antonio Pappano, who has worked with Rana on two critically acclaimed discs, has given her some of the most helpful advice she's ever had

programmes as a journey,' she says. 'It's very difficult to explain in words, but the main concept of this album is duality. In *Miroirs* you have both perceived and real images; in *Petrushka* you have the marionette and the human, and the dissonance in the last chord, because you can't resolve everything. And with Stravinsky's music, *The Firebird* or *Petrushka*, the music doesn't become just a visual thing, a story or a description – it becomes physical movement, dance.'

There's no shortage of physicality, either, I suggest, in performing these Stravinsky scores – brilliantly virtuosic orchestral showpieces in their original form – on the piano. Rana agrees, but points to the important differences between the two piano versions. 'I think of the *Petrushka* as a transcription,' she explains, 'while the Agosti *Firebird* is a "translation" for the piano. For Stravinsky the idea was more important than whether or not it was doable. Both are incredibly challenging, but you can see that for *Petrushka* the concept was too strong for Stravinsky to renounce anything from the orchestra. And that makes life very difficult for the pianist,' she adds with a laugh. 'But it's just a matter of practice sometimes. Everything is possible, and everything is necessary for what he had in mind.'

She describes Agosti's arrangement as 'an incredible transcription', but it came about very differently. 'It's done by someone who wanted to play the piece, so the

'trouble' never, one suspects, remains trouble for long. Does she really find it as easy as it seems, I ask, reminding her of those *Goldberg* sessions. 'Recording the *Goldbergs* was intense, but in a very different way from this programme,' she admits. 'The Ravel and Stravinsky are also, as we've said, very physical. We have to remind ourselves that being a musician is intellectual in part, emotional of course, as well – but it's also physical. The *Goldbergs* are challenging on an intellectual and emotional level, which also becomes a spiritual one – but physically, they're not that demanding.'

Matters are helped by the fact that it hasn't taken long for the young pianist to develop a highly effective and impressively pragmatic approach to being in front of the microphone. 'In the recording studio, I always try to be very calm and organised

approach is that of a pianist who needed to play it.' *La valse* is a different matter again. 'It's also a transcription, but made by Ravel, who was a terrible pianist. He writes two lines and then, for those brave enough, a third line of options. If you look at just those two lines, it doesn't look so virtuosic. The trouble comes when you want to put in the third line!'

Rana, though, projects such a persona of calm assurance – both in interview and on stage – that such



Rana's persona of calm assurance allows her to overcome any obstacles she encounters with ease

with the schedule. In concert, it happens only once and it either goes well or doesn't; but there's still the aim of communicating with the audience. When I get into the studio, everything changes so much. Of course, you can repeat things a million times and try to get perfection, but at the same time, "perfection" is not really what I'm looking for; I also want it to be

as I would do it on stage. But that's the controversial thing: for perfection you need to repeat things many times, but that doesn't work for being emotionally powerful. You should also know very well what you're looking for. There should always be a strong motivation – speaking for myself, at least – to lock yourself in the recording studio.'

For developing her positive attitude to the studio, Rana also benefited from the experience of recording that first Warner album. 'I remember very well the words Tony Pappano said to me that first time we recorded together. It was very intense and we worked so much on the musical ideas and the interpretation. But at one point he told me: "You have to be very smart, because you're not communicating with a person. The microphone isn't sensitive on an emotional level like a person. You can't talk normally to the microphone: you have to seduce it." I think I'll print these words out as many times as I can, because I think this was the most helpful advice I've ever been given. It was a great lesson for me to record my first studio album with him, because I really got the best sense of how to make something that's so unnatural seem natural.'

Rana's attitude to competitions is characteristically focused: 'I just applied to the ones that gave me concerts afterwards'

Rana's first recordings, however, have their origins in an environment that, one might say, is no less unnatural: the piano competition. An album on ATMA Classique of Scriabin and Chopin (including a superb account of the Op 28 Preludes) came out of her first prize in the piano competition of the 2011 Concours Musical International de Montréal. The Harmonia Mundi recording of Bartók, Ravel and Schumann that followed her silver medal at the 2013 Cliburn Competition commanded attention in these pages: 'Beatrice Rana possesses an old soul that belies her 20 years, and more than a touch of genius,' concluded Jed Distler (2/14).

She laughs when I suggest that at least her competition days are behind her. 'I hope so! But I tell you: you think you're over with competitions, but it's not really true, because every time you go on stage, you're going to play for people who judge you. I don't mean that in a negative way. It's just that everyone has a brain and has ears and can decide whether they like what they're listening to. Music is very subjective; opinions are very subjective. But this is brought to the extreme in competitions.'

Like many, Rana thinks that the number of such contests out there is excessive, and her attitude towards them is characteristically focused. 'They were useful for me, because I got to do what I really wanted, which was to be a concert pianist. That's why I just applied to the ones that would give me concerts afterwards.' They ended up, in fact, bringing a lot more. One juror in Montreal, Jean-Philippe Collard, was instrumental in opening doors, not least to the offices of both her current agent and her label, Warner Classics – or EMI, as it then was. 'He was very enthusiastic and said he'd introduce me to these people and those people, which really helped the magic world of being a concert pianist open up to me.'

Indeed, it becomes clear while talking to Rana that this was the only course she ever wanted to take. She seems a bit stumped when I ask her if there was anything else she ever considered as a career. 'I could have been a good doctor or architect or something else,' she says, politely answering the question, 'but I never really considered it. It's difficult to talk

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about this, because being born into a musical family makes music so normal. When you're born with something that is in your blood, it's very difficult to stay away from it, and I couldn't think of one day without the piano.'

Both her parents are pianists: her mother a solfège teacher, her father working with singers and in opera houses. 'It's a good contrast, and they make a very good team.' She explains that her father – 'an incredible sight-reader' – was on hand as she learnt the concerto repertoire, on one occasion navigating the full score of a new concerto by Carlo Boccadoro that his daughter had to learn for a premiere at La Scala, Milan (in January 2017). 'I asked my dad if he could help me, and he just started playing it!'

Part of Rana's balance and maturity, it seems, comes from the fact that she was able to continue with something like a regular childhood while pursuing her music. 'It was very natural for me to start to play, but I also went to normal schools. And I remember one day a friend of mine asked me to come to her apartment to study together (I must have been seven or eight). My mum took me there and as soon as I arrived I noticed that they had no piano. I was completely shocked: "Mama, there's no piano!" She had to explain that not *everyone* has a piano at home! But for me it was the most natural thing in the world, and that's always been my attitude to music.'

I wonder, though, if there have been any rough patches in Rana's relationship with her instrument. Not really, seems to be the answer. 'I never had problems with the piano,' she says, pondering for a moment as to whether she really wants to expand on her answer. 'I had problems with what I could *do* with the piano. I always wanted to do better but sometimes couldn't understand how.' She counts herself lucky to have had Benedetto Lupo as a teacher for so long, and for joining his class at the Nino Rota conservatoire in Monopoli, not far from her home in Lecce, at a very early stage. 'He's such a great teacher, and one of the most generous teachers ever. But when someone is generous, you have to repay that generosity by doing everything he asks, and I didn't always succeed at that. I remember once that I didn't succeed at all and I was very angry and couldn't understand why. When you're young, it's sometimes difficult.'

'The thing is that learning music is much more than the physical skill you have to learn. It's also an intellectual and critical way of learning the score, and a teacher also needs to




Beatrice Rana: straightforwardly and genuinely friendly and personable

'When I was a child, my mum had to explain to me that not everyone has a piano at home – I was completely shocked!'

help you develop your personality. On top of that there's a very strong psychological element that means you can do it or you can't. That's why there are many great musical minds that unfortunately never make it on to the stage – and also why some that are not the greatest musical minds do make it.' On making that point, she recalls with a laugh an interview which began with the journalist declaring: 'I could have been Pollini, but my psychological aptitude doesn't allow me.' It's an opener I imagine her responding to with a wry smile.

For seven years, Rana's musical training also included studying the famously rigorous composition course that is offered by Italian universities. It's something that she relished: 'I explored so many worlds, and the Renaissance in particular was so mind-opening for me. As pianists we are always used to having a very harmonic, and therefore a very vertical, attitude to music. But at that time in music history there was so much freedom in how these lines were moving so beautifully – independently yet with a common sense of harmony.' It also helped her appreciate even more the composers whose music she plays: 'I remembered myself when I had to compose four-voice fugues. I tell you, it's very hard!'

The composition course was cut short when she moved to continue her studies at the piano mecca that is Hanover's Hochschule für Musik, which took her out of the 'normal environment' in which she'd lived and learnt up until then. Then, and as her international career subsequently took off, Italy remained a constant. And she has recently set up a chamber music festival back home to expand her activity in that area of the repertoire too. 'Chamber music is a very big love,' she says. 'I was born into a musical family and my sister is a cellist, so I grew up making music with other people. I invite friends, most of them are young soloists like me, and we have the time to rehearse together, without the usual pressures. That's like an oasis for me, where I basically do what I want!'

It's an advantage of coming from Italy, I suggest, that it can't be difficult to persuade these colleagues to come and visit. She laughs and admits that one artist she invited this year had asked her if she actually worked for the local tourist board, so well was she promoting the city's charms. It's clearly a win-win situation. 'I make artist friends of mine discover my place, because it's not a place that's usually known for concerts, and show them another love of my life: my country and my home.' 

Beatrice Rana's *Ravel and Stravinsky* album is reviewed on page 69

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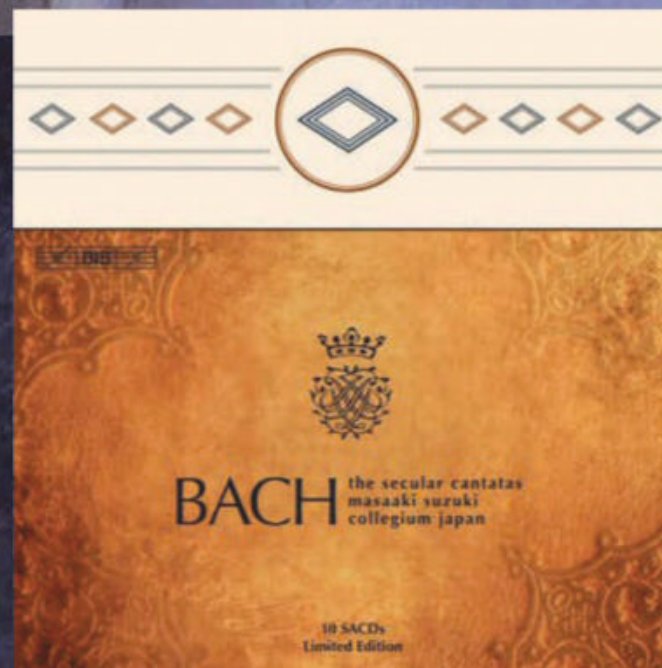
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REDISCOVERING SAMSON

John Butt's ongoing quest for authenticity has resulted in not one but two historically informed recorded re-creations of Handel's original intentions for his longest oratorio, finds **David Vickers**

The violins here should be like an uncontrollable sneeze!' exclaims John Butt from the harpsichord positioned between the large orchestra in front of him and an assembled choir of soloists (with a few reinforcements) gathered behind him. There is relaxed laughter among the Dunedin Consort, who have gathered at St Jude's in Hampstead, north London, to record Handel's *Samson*. A little later, Butt articulates another idea to everyone while miming with actions: 'It's like a mousetrap – although a nice humane one with a bit of cheese inside, and where you can let the mouse go in the morning!' It's an example of the infectious sense of fun described by violinist Cecilia Bernardini in an anecdote she shares with me: 'John has inexhaustible positivity and a hilarious sense of humour. During recording, he was trying to explain to the children's choir what the music had to represent and started

acting it out by marching up and down. The session had to be stopped because all the strange noises made the take unusable!' Horn player Anneke Scott agrees: 'John's imagination has a way of conjuring up some quirky image or other about the music that grabs our attention and gets us all pulling in the same direction to capture the essence of the music.'

The Dunedin Consort, named after the ancient Celtic name for Edinburgh Castle (Din Eidyn), was founded in 1995 by baritone Ben Parry and soprano Susan Hamilton to establish a world-class vocal ensemble in the city. Their debut album, 'In the Beginning' (Linn, 2001), was a mixture of Copland and Barber, and other early experiences in the studio included providing quartets of voices within a larger chorus for Sir Charles Mackerras and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra's accounts of Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (Telarc, 2000)

and *Idomeneo* (EMI, 2002). Meanwhile, Butt taught at universities in Aberdeen, Berkeley and Cambridge before moving to the University of Glasgow in 2001. It was a stroke of good fortune for the Dunedin Consort. As he explains: 'I'd known Ben from way back at Cambridge. When he left Scotland in 2003 to become Director of Music at St Paul's School in London, there was obviously a big hole, and he recommended that I did at least some of the musical direction of the Dunedin Consort. So I went along and pushed it more in the direction of Baroque, Classical and late Renaissance music.'

It was Butt who consolidated the group's fledgling relationship with audiophile Scottish label Linn. He had already, as a harpsichordist, worked with producer Philip Hobbs on 'Les douze Noël's' (released 2004), an album of music by Daquin performed by RSAMD musicians conducted by John Wallace, and had been impressed with Linn's sound quality and production. 'I was keen to pursue the relationship further,' he recalls. 'Phil Hobbs has proved to be a remarkable figure in our artistic development.' Butt's debut recording at the helm of the Dunedin Consort was a revelatory reconstruction of Handel's 1742 Dublin premiere of *Messiah*, presenting the correct content of the score given on that occasion, and using reduced choral performing forces with soloists also leading sections of the small choir; the recording deservedly won the Baroque Vocal *Gramophone* Award in 2007. The following year, benchmark recordings appeared of Handel's original 1718 Cannons version of *Acis and Galatea* (seldom judged so perfectly in content and scale) and the *St Matthew Passion*, taking theories

about Bach's choir of single voices spearheaded by Joshua Rifkin and Andrew Parrott to new levels of artistic interpretation.

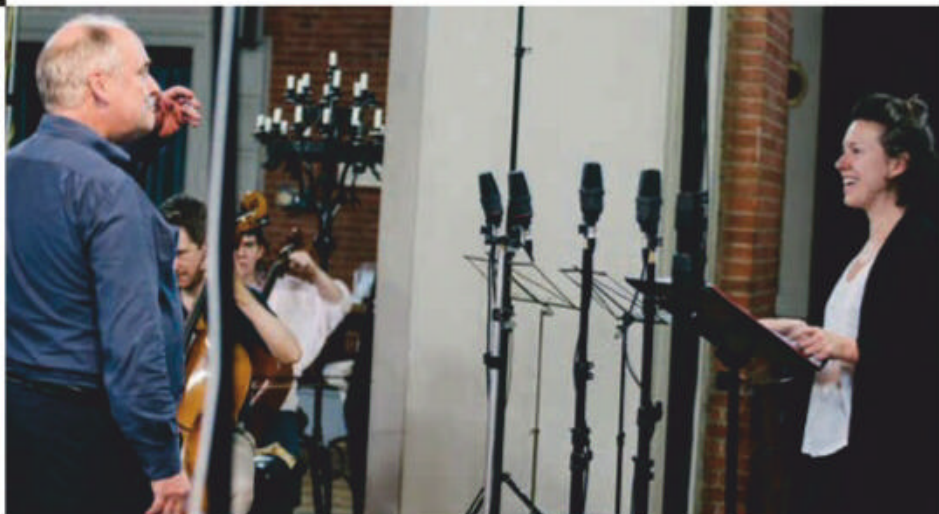
Since then, several more masterpieces by Bach and Handel have benefited from the Dunedin Consort's curiosity. An innovative Mozart Requiem won another *Gramophone* Award (Choral category, 2014), while a reappraisal of Monteverdi's 1610 *Vespers* (recorded and released in 2017) demonstrated the group's capabilities in early 17th-century Italian music. Butt even found time (in 2013) to record the complete *Well-Tempered Clavier* – all this and more while wearing dozens of hats and spinning hundreds of plates in his academic job at the University of Glasgow. Under his sagacious direction, the

Dunedin Consort has firmly established a world-class period-instrument ensemble in addition to the core vocal group, they tour across Scotland from Dumfries to Oban, and appear regularly

in Edinburgh and London. Also, they now export coals to Newcastle with confidence, having performed Bach's church music in Weimar and Leipzig, taken the 1610 *Vespers* to Monteverdi's birthplace, Cremona, and presented *Samson* at the Handel Festival in the composer's native city, Halle.

Several eminent scholars speculate that a slimline choir constituting only soloists reinforced by one or two extras might be how *Samson* was presented at its Covent Garden premiere on February 18, 1743 – and perhaps also how the same company gave the first London airing of *Messiah* a month later. Indeed, Handel drafted the scores of both iconic oratorios during the summer and autumn of 1741, completing the first draft of *Samson* on October 29, 1741, before travelling to

'I aim to show the extent of the possibilities available to Handel, from single-voice to doubled performance' – John Butt



Top left: Butt and Mary Bevan; top right/bottom left: Joshua Ellicott and Jess Dandy; soloists including Matthew Brook, back centre, join the chorus, including Tiffin Boys' Choir



'Exporting coals to Newcastle with confidence': John Butt and his Dunedin Consort perform Bach at Leipzig's church of St Nicholas in May earlier this year

Dublin. Upon his return to London in the autumn of 1742, the composer substantially reworked *Samson* – finishing the detailed orchestration and setting the recitatives to music while jettisoning some unwanted lines from Newburgh Hamilton's adaptation of John Milton's closet drama *Samson Agonistes* (the librettist also made ingenious use of at least 15 other Milton poems). Much of the music was revised and rewritten, and the work was considerably expanded. He eventually finished the score on October 12, 1742, satisfied that it was ready for performance.

It is extremely unusual for *Samson* to be given complete without cuts. Hot on the heels of a gloriously intact concert to an amazed packed audience in Halle, the Dunedin Consort decamped to St Jude's to record the work while its manifold musical riches and dramatic nuances were still fresh. Just to make life (and fundraising) even more interesting, Butt chose to record all the choruses twice – once with just nine singers, reconstructing Handel's likely practice for the 1743 premiere, and then all over again with a much larger choir of 39 (the same core of nine, plus eleven children from the Tiffin Boys' Choir, two additional adult female sopranos, five extra altos and six more both tenors and basses), thereby recreating the large mixed choir with both female soloists and boys on the top line that became normal practice in Handel's later oratorio concert seasons, including several (shortened) revivals of *Samson*. It is the first time that either, let alone both, of these historically informed replications of the composer's own choral forces have been used for a recording of any of his epic dramatic English oratorios.

'I like the notion of a soloistic choir, where everybody sings with their full voice and has their own little take' – John Butt

In actual fact, says Butt, the focal point of the larger choir isn't that different, 'because you still have soloists leading it, though obviously you get a sense of expansion. It's as if you take a black-and-white drawing of the single voices and fill it in with shading and colour – it's an amplification of the small choir rather than something completely different.' He continues: 'My ambition is to show the absolute range and extent of the possibilities that were available to Handel at the time, from single-voice

performance to doubled performance, and I hope it will inaugurate a debate as to what chorus singing might actually be in an 18th-century context.'

Ultimately, it is essential for the Dunedin Consort's singers

to be equally at home whether they're inhabiting solo characters in the drama or singing together as a choir. Unlike many other conductors, though, Butt doesn't believe that a smooth, blended sound is essential. 'I like the notion of a soloistic choir, where everybody sings with their full voice and has their own little take, and you might even have inconsistencies of rhythm and articulation – it's so much more dynamic and opens up a larger range of possibilities than singers having to damp themselves down in the way that so many other forms of choir culture require.'

This is an approach that bass Matthew Brook very much enjoys: 'One of the benefits of singing in the choir, and then stepping out as a soloist, is that you feel so much more part of the drama throughout the performance. As a soloist, it can be tough sitting out there for long spells in full view of the audience, waiting ages for your next moment.' He admits, though, that he

has to pace himself: 'There's the game of making sure you don't let rip too much in the choruses, then do a poor last aria because your stamina let you down!' As well as being linchpin of the choir's basses, Brook takes the role of Samson's anguished father, Manoah. 'It's unbelievable what Matthew does,' enthuses Butt. 'He's so intuitive – a very imaginative and spiritual singer. I can't really imagine anyone doing "How willing my paternal love" better than him.' The appreciation is mutual. As Brook tells me in rehearsals, 'John makes us aware of musical conversations going on between the players and singers – things that can spark off much more interesting colours and vivaciousness. But then he trusts soloists to take the stage and be themselves.'

'It's a challenge trying to sell a version with a much larger body of recitatives than some audiences are accustomed to' – John Butt

Until now, no interpretation of *Samson* has perfectly tackled its unique fusion of Milton's literary themes, classical-tinged drama, biblical and political ideas as understood in early Georgian Britain, and phenomenal musical breadth throughout a measured plot populated by intensely emotional central characters. Butt acknowledges the task of pacing the sheer amount of music and text successfully. 'This is by far the best libretto of Handel's dramatic oratorios, in terms of its quality and the depth of emotions within it. At least in its somewhat shortened form it was hugely successful in his own time and beyond, but it's a great pity that nowadays we don't really value it in the same way that we value *Israel in Egypt* or *Messiah*. The first performance version has a lot of recitative that was later cut out, which is a pity because it's close to Milton's text. So there's a challenge here in trying to sell the original and complete first-performance version with a much larger body of recitatives than some audiences are accustomed to. In the event, I reckon it works extremely well because you can see more clearly how the huge amount of text influenced Handel to design unusually concise arias, and how the entire range of conversations and moods sustained across long scenes actually helped him to fulfil the unities of time, place and action. No other piece of Handel does this, and it comes from Milton's closet drama – it's meant to take the same amount of time that the original biblical event took. This new sense of realism is a rare experiment by Handel, who is mapping musical reality on to actual reality: time doesn't slow down or accelerate like it does in his other theatre pieces. To my mind, the key is to make arias work within the continuity of the rhythm of the piece as well as to emphasise their individuality in terms of their motifs, gestures and so on. The difficulty is how to wind the arias into the continuous conversation, create a trajectory, and also capture the different underlying timbres and colours of each act. I'd compare it to Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope*, which has the illusion that it was done in a single take.'

Soloists have prepared diligently to inhabit their characters. Tenor Joshua Ellicott's conception of the imprisoned and blinded Samson 'being in his own space, and unaware of anything else' was conveyed in concerts and carried through to the recording sessions. The journey of the fallen hero's bitterness at being forsaken by God, and his guilt at his own culpability, are expressed by his lament that 'sun, moon and stars are dark to me' ('Total eclipse'); but in Act 3 when he is led away to his doom at the temple of Dagon, he departs with a rapturous description of the rising sun dispelling shadows ('Thus when



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the sun', its text taken from Milton's ode *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*). Butt says this sublime farewell is 'like shining a light on the end times in the here and now – what Christian theologians might call "realised eschatology"; like getting a vision of what happens after worldly life'. Ellicott adds his own insight into the troubled hero: 'I'm not sure that there ought to be any real difference in portraying a character on stage in oratorio as opposed to opera, but a true and honest expression of Samson's path from blindness to spiritual

sight is much subtler than any extraneous movement or gesture can conjure. I've tried to be open to Samson's vulnerabilities so that a coherent and touching character can emerge. It helps that John wears his academic authority lightly – everyone's egos are put aside, and every performance has the sense of an ensemble responding to each other's ideas.'

Jess Dandy in the contralto role of Micah makes pivotal contributions almost like a Greek classical chorus. Her literary interests come to the fore when she points out how her character 'dismantles Samson's claustrophobic self-recrimination and refuses to accept his isolation as final and inevitable: he shows us that Samson is much more than he would have us believe'. Dandy observes that the double function of solo character and choir section leader 'demands hyper-engagement and frenetically shifting perspectives' but that it can provide 'a real sense of incisive lucidity'.

The cast also includes the soprano Bevan sisters. 'Sophie's experience of the opera stage pays off fantastically in Dalila's visit to Samson,' Butt says. 'Handel so often makes bad people – like Dalila – appealing, and again the comparison to Hitchcock comes in handy here because both Handel and Hitchcock make us attracted to somebody in the first moment that we meet and hear them but then they're ultimately exposed as being quite evil.' Mary Bevan's altogether more virtuous Israelite Woman has the oratorio's last word with the trumpet aria 'Let the bright seraphim', using lines adapted from Milton's *At a Solemn Musick* (which itself famously begins with the words 'Blest pair of sirens'). Trumpeter Paul Sharp believes less is more when the voice and trumpet mimic and echo each other. 'There's a danger that over-embellishment here becomes a sport, more about



In the trumpet aria, Paul Sharp is 'happy to leave the fireworks to the soprano'

'I've tried to be open to Samson's vulnerabilities so a coherent and touching character can emerge' – Joshua Ellicott, tenor

to both choral incarnations). In these straitened times of financial unpredictability, their next recording plans will need to wait for expensive dust to settle. In the meantime, Butt and his musicians are busy giving concerts all over the world; they recently performed at the Boston Early Music Festival in the US, and soon travel to Colombia. They performed all of Bach's keyboard concertos with nine diverse solo harpsichordists at

the Edinburgh International Festival, and at the BBC Proms they interspersed Bach's four orchestral suites with new pieces commissioned from Stuart MacRae, Nico Muhly, Ailie Robertson and Stevie

Wishart. Butt is convinced that using old instruments for new music 'is a very productive way of tying the past to the present' and hopes to do more of this. Looking to the immediate future, there are Purcell song projects with solo singers, and they're keen to do more 16th- and 17th-century music. Butt is also sharing his conducting duties with some guest directors, for instance the Dunedin's tenor Nicholas Mulroy will conduct the choir and its apprentices in Victoria's Requiem alongside modern works by James MacMillan, Roderick Williams and Cecilia McDowall on tour around Scotland. 'We're trying to expand the outlook of

the group by cultivating younger singers,' explains Butt, 'and it also fulfils part of the original brief of the group – to provide a world-class choral spine to Scottish culture.'

The Dunedin Consort's recording of Handel's 'Samson' on Linn will be reviewed in the December issue.

The physical CD release features the full-chorus version, but free bonus tracks of the 20 nine-voice choruses are available to download from the Dunedin Consort and Linn websites. Complete performances of both the full-chorus and small-chorus versions are available to download or stream, with Linn offering downloads of both versions for the price of one from its own website.



John Butt: the driving force behind the Dunedin Consort's projects

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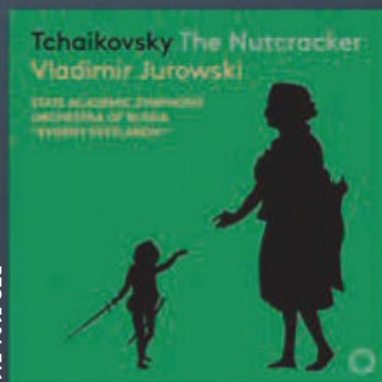
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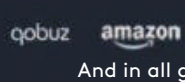
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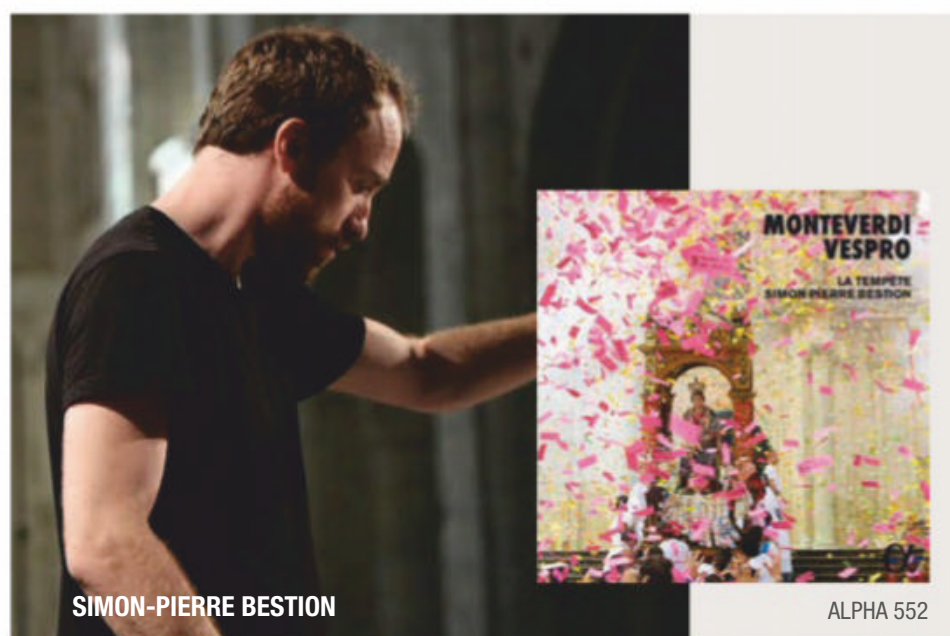
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QUARTET

connections

The Pavel Haas players share an easy rapport which translates into a profound musicianship, most recently evident in their approach to Shostakovich's string quartets, finds **Richard Bratby**

or as long as two violinists, a viola player and a cellist have sat down together to make music, it's been held up as an idyll. It's Vikram Seth's 'equal music'; it's the 'friendly communion of instruments' of which Ernst Heimeran wrote in *The Well-Tempered String Quartet* (1936). Above all, the string quartet has been described as a conversation. Which is all very well, but I'm sitting in a Marylebone hotel lounge near Wigmore Hall with all four members of the Pavel Haas Quartet, and the practical business of conducting a literal four-way

conversation with a string quartet turns out to be another matter altogether. If you've ever played in a quartet, it won't come entirely as a surprise to learn that the cellist, Peter Jarůšek, jumps in first: 'We're doing the *Trout* Quintet tonight – which is something we don't do very often because we don't have the free time.' And with the cue thrown, the others quickly start to chime in. 'Oh, it's so beautiful,' comments Veronika Jarůšková, the first violinist. Who are you playing it with? 'Boris Giltburg,' says Jarůšková, and viola player Jiří Kabát can't hold back: 'He's great!' he says. 'Yes, I mean he's outstanding,' agrees Jarůšek. 'We feel close, very close.' And Kabát: 'Fifth member of the quartet almost, right?'

Gramophone readers who've heard the PHQ's recording of Dvořák's Second Piano Quintet with Giltburg will already have experienced the freshness, warmth and unforced expressive rapport that made it the runaway winner in the Chamber category of the 2018 *Gramophone* Awards. But then, this young Prague-based quartet – they still seem youthful in spirit, though they've been playing as a group for 17 years now – hoover up awards almost every time they release a disc. Their debut recording of quartets by Janáček and Haas won the 2007 *Gramophone* Chamber Award; discs of Schubert (2014) and Smetana (2015) both followed suit, with recordings of Prokofiev quartets and a second Janáček–Haas album both receiving nominations. And in 2011, their recording of Dvořák's quartets Opp 96 and 106 went the whole way and was voted *Gramophone* Recording of the Year.

'What can I say?' responds second violinist Marek Zwiebel, slightly sheepishly. There's clearly something about the way that this friendly, unfussy group of musicians play together that both listeners and critics adore. With a track record like this, the PHQ's next recording automatically becomes a subject of particular interest – and it perhaps comes as a surprise, for a quartet that has

been building its discography predominantly around Czech repertoire. The next release will feature Shostakovich's quartets: the Second (his best known and one of his longest), the Eighth and the Seventh (his shortest). Swapping Bohemia's woods and meadows for the steppes of Soviet Russia looks, superficially, like a radical departure. Is Shostakovich really so central to the group's musical life?

'We feel that he is,' says Zwiebel. 'We've played Shostakovich's music from the very beginning.' 'We always just really felt it's a part of our hearts, actually,' says Jarůšková. 'It's really very close to us. So, we just decided, after years of playing it, to put it on disc.' It turns out to have been quite a long-established project. 'We've planned, I think, two times already, to record a Shostakovich disc,' explains Jarůšek. 'But the first time, purely coincidentally, Pavel Nikl, one of our original members, was forced to drop out of the concerts because of family illness, so that was one reason why we couldn't do it.'

'We've played Shostakovich's music from the very beginning. We always just felt it's a part of our heart' – Veronika Jarůšková, 1st violin

'It was just not the right time,' observes Jarůšková. And that matters, because performing these works takes a particular emotional and physical toll on the performers – and performing is a vital element in preparing a recording. Zwiebel describes the impact: 'Right now we're playing Schubert, after such an intense period of work on Shostakovich. If you let Shostakovich's music into your body, into your soul, into your heart, it could be ... I don't know – it's a strong word: "devastating". But in a way, such strong and intense emotions are exhausting.' Jarůšek backs him up. 'I've always noticed with Shostakovich this pressure he puts on individual players throughout the quartet – with long pedal notes and long, intense solos.'

Zwiebel agrees: 'The Eighth is not a typical quartet structure.' 'No, it's not,' says Jarůšek. 'But on the other hand, it is not only darkness. There is a lot of hope and some really very personal, very gentle music.' 'There is always something behind those solos,' comments Jarůšková. 'Some hidden world, some hidden light.' She continues: 'We spent quite a few days with Shostakovich during recording, and I feel like we've lived with him. We didn't only play him: we lived him.'

And, of course, few string quartets since Beethoven's have been the subject of more relentless extramusical analysis than Shostakovich's Eighth. For the PHQ, though, the path to the work's soul is through the notes on the page, plus the players' own experiences. Kabát speaks up: 'It's a combination of things.'



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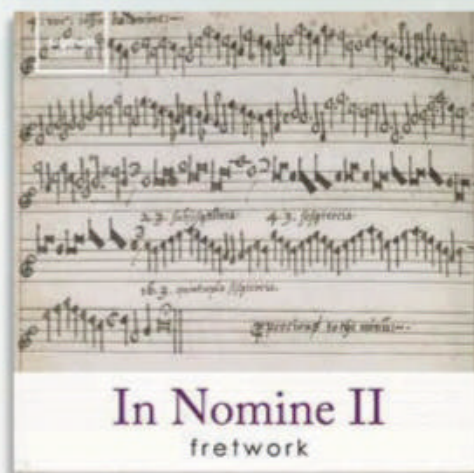
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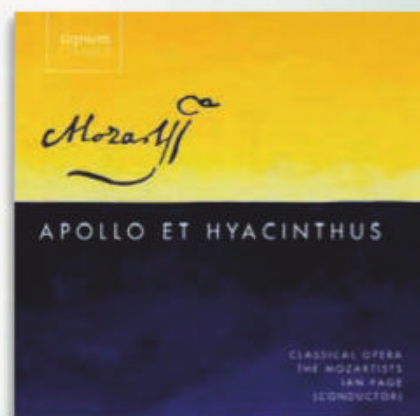
Completing the project that began with *In Nomine*, the group seek to look both back to their debut release and to bring the genre up to date, including examples of the *In Nomine* and related forms that they didn't, or couldn't have recorded back in 1987.

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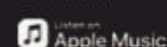
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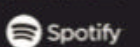
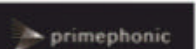
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From left, Veronika Jarůšková, Marek Zwiebel, Peter Jarůšek and Jiří Kabát: committed to excellence, yet less top-down in approach – more patient, individualistic, friendly

We are all individuals, and we're here together finding and making our own little messages and stories in the music. We're imagining it anew each time. It could have something to do with Shostakovich's biography; or it could be just music, you know?' 'We've been playing No 8 for maybe 12 years,' adds Jarůšek. 'We've talked about it every time we play it. So there's a never-ending process.' 'We worked for a few hours just on the opening of No 8, just these few notes,' says Jarůšková. 'The speed of the vibrato, the speed of bow – it can be dark, it can be cold.'

Jarůšková admits to feeling a particular closeness to perhaps the least familiar quartet of the set, the expansive and (for Shostakovich) surprisingly optimistic Second. 'I love it,' the violinist says. 'For me, it's very, very personal, very intimate.' Yet it's also something of a blockbuster in concert. 'It's big,' she agrees. 'It's huge!' exclaims Jarůšek. 'For me, it's like imagining playing in a full symphony orchestra, complete with bells. When we performed it, we planned to do it in the first half,

with Beethoven in the second. Then we realised, as soon as we did that, that it just wasn't musically possible. So we changed the order after the first concert.' 'There was no possible encore after the Second,' says Jarůšková. 'It was like the audience had been overwhelmed, and so had we.'

The conversation seems to be going well: a lively exchange between all four players, in true quartet style. It's always inspiring when, in person, artists live up to the impression they create in their music-making – in this case, good humour and the 'unerring' and 'completely unstudied' give and take perceived by Harriet Smith on reviewing their *Gramophone* Award-winning Dvořák disc in 2017. Having recently read Valentin Berlinsky's memoir of his career in the Borodin Quartet, I'm struck by the fact that the PHQ – like many 21st-century chamber ensembles – has a very different philosophy of chamber music. It is no less committed to excellence, but is perhaps less top-down in its approach, more patient, more individualistic – in a word, more friendly.



'We like to go very deep inside the piece': the Pavel Haas players working with Supraphon recording director Jiří Gemrot (left) and sound engineer Karel Soukeník (right)



Exciting prospect: the PHQ have finally let Shostakovich's 'devastating' music into their repertoire

In its early days, the group trained under the late Milan Škampa, the viola player of the fabled Smetana Quartet. Do the players see themselves as belonging to a particular Bohemian school, or tradition, of quartet playing? 'No,' says Jarůšek. 'There isn't really a Czech school. Even the famous older quartets played very differently.' 'Especially the Vlach and Smetana quartets,' agrees Jarůšková. 'They were really different.' She continues: 'Mr Škampa was always speaking about the importance of finding something behind the notes. It helps to find a way to communicate to the audience, because really our aim is just to speak to them.' Jarůšek adds, 'And to speak to each other. It's like singing, let's say. Singing without words. We spend a lot of time rehearsing, and we occasionally listen to other quartets, but we never over-analyse. We're following our instincts as well.'

'I heard they needed a violinist. I messaged them on Facebook and then Peter called saying, "Play a concert!"' – Marek Zwiebel, 2nd violin

But when you're pursuing an artistic career in tandem with three colleagues, in close and constant enforced proximity, it's surely crucial that those instincts align? Jarůšková and Jarůšek are married, with a young daughter. 'She understands, thank God!' exclaims Jarůšková. Zwiebel and Kabát both agree that time spent with family, away from the quartet, is vital. Kabát lives in the countryside and they meet to practise in Prague, usually in Peter and Veronika's apartment: 'It's practical,' says Jarůšková. 'The kindergarten is just around the corner.' Life is clearly not something that is separate from music.

'We're very flexible,' says Jarůšek. 'We could close the door on our rehearsals, but in a sense we can't really, because our personal lives are still there.' While Škampa famously described

life in a quartet as 'the most beautiful prison in the musical world', the PHQ's rehearsals are built around the free and friendly exchange of ideas.

'We always rehearse in the mornings,' says Jarůšková, 'but the thing is, we are always late – all of us. Then, we have a coffee.' The others laugh in agreement. She continues: 'We already know what we will play and what we will work on. I mean, I think all of us know what we need to do.' Her husband takes up the theme: 'We all have our different ears. Someone is more worried about the rhythm; someone wants to concentrate on the dynamics ...' 'I'm like, "Guys, it's about the love,"' says Jarůšková, 'and then someone else will say, "Yes, but we are not together." The ideas come together like a mosaic.' 'This is the combination, and it works,' agrees Jarůšek. 'We are trying to reach something ideal. It's unattainable. But this is the way to try to get there.'

This relaxed to and fro – and all these late starts and coffee breaks – feels a long way from Škampa's 'prison'. When members of the Borodin Quartet left, Berlinsky denounced them for betrayal. When Nikl, the PHQ's original viola player, left in 2016, he and the quartet stayed firm friends;

in fact, he was appointed their 'permanent guest' for string quintet performances. They recruited Zwiebel in 2012 in the most disarmingly informal – and modern – way. 'I knew Peter only from playing soccer together, in a musicians' team,' the second violinist recalls. 'Then one of my friends heard that the Pavel Haas needed a violinist, so I left a message on their Facebook page. And then Peter, one nice Sunday, called me. He was like, "Play a concert!"' 'I'd already checked out his playing on YouTube!' laughs Jarůšek.

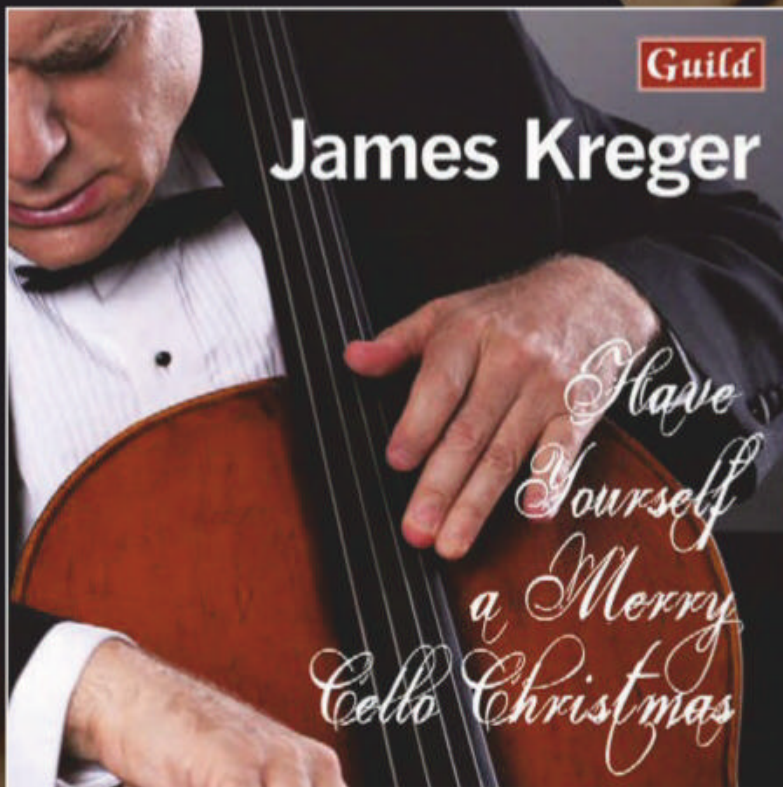
It was thanks to Zwiebel that the group has, at last, ventured into Bartók. 'Until then, I felt that this was fantastic music, but I didn't understand it,' says Jarůšek. 'And then Marek came. It was his idea; he loves Bartók, and he opened the door for us. And next season we'll play No 4. Everything in its time.' That seems to be how the PHQ operates. The idea matured, colleagues were listened to, a consensus was reached – and anyone who's enjoyed the group's work so far will already be excited at the prospect of what's to come. That includes ('Spoiler alert!' pipes up Kabát) a Martinů quartet cycle at Wigmore Hall, starting in 2021. 'Many notes,' smiles Jarůšková. 'But Martinů is very special music,' counters Kabát. They have no intention of rushing it – of spoiling the naturalness, the insight, and the very human communicative quality that emerges from their particular way of working, and living, as a string quartet.

'We can't just play what people expect,' says Jarůšek. 'We have to have a strong connection to the music. Really, really strong. I mean, we don't play that much repertoire.' Zwiebel agrees: 'We like to go very deep inside the piece. It takes ages.' The others nod in agreement, and Jarůšek reaches around for the perfect metaphor. 'You've heard of slow cooking, slow cuisine? So, we are a slow quartet, you know. We are very slow. It takes a really long time. We don't want to say the other quartets are not good. We are just slower.' **G**

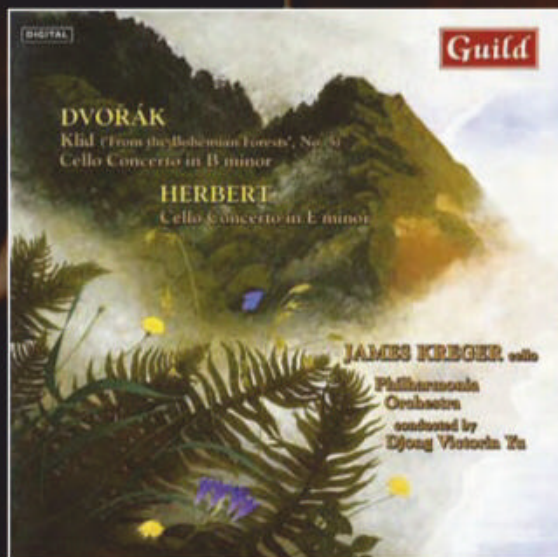
► Our review of the Pavel Haas Quartet's Shostakovich CD is on page 61

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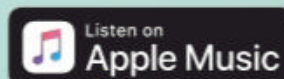
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Where JANÁČEK himself is your guide

The Moravian city of Brno continues to celebrate the music of its most famous resident, Leoš Janáček, with performances of his masterpieces and the opportunity to follow in his footsteps

Marking 165 years since the birth of Leoš Janáček in July, the picturesque city of Brno took delivery of a newly painted tram. It was decorated by local artist Vendulka Chalánková, who wrapped its wagons with evocative images of characters from the composer's operas. In the century since Janáček's death, those operas have become some of the most-performed in the world.

Were he around today, it's unlikely Janáček would have been persuaded to climb aboard the special tram. A proud Moravian, the composer

refused to use the electric trams new to Brno in his day, given their German provenance. He preferred to travel the city by foot. We would recommend you do the same, with Janáček as your personal guide.

They say Brno is to Janáček what Salzburg is to Mozart. In fact, the links are far stronger. The composer was born in Hukvaldy but travelled the 160km west to Brno at the age of 11. He remained here for the rest of his life.

After the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918, when Janáček was almost 70, Brno was

*They say Brno is to Janáček what
Salzburg is to Mozart – in fact,
the links are far stronger*



Above (l-r): one of Brno's newly painted trams, depicting characters from Janáček's operas; a performance of *The Cunning Little Vixen* at the National Theatre Brno; and an information panel on the Janáček trail outside the Leoš Janáček Memorial



Above (l-r): the Vegetable Market with the Parnas Fountain in front of the Grandezza Hotel; the multicoloured water display in front of the Janáček Theatre Brno; and an animated video courtesy of leosjanacek.eu



Leoš Janáček with his wife Zdenka in the garden of their house in the grounds of the Organ School he founded in Brno

transformed. As Moravia's new administrative centre, the city underwent a construction boom. Its picturesque streets were complemented by some of the finest 20th-century architecture in Europe. A new school of design emerged: Brno Functionalism. This spirit of creative innovation, with a high regard for beauty and elegance, characterises Brno to this day.

But the city is most proud of its illustrious musical son. Janáček wrote all his major works in Brno. He frequented its bars, restaurants and shops and was Principal of the famous Brno Organ School (now the Conservatory). Every two years, Brno resounds to the composer's music during the international Janáček Brno festival (September-October 2020).


The breadth of music on offer in the Moravian capital stretches far and wide, with a sacred music festival at Easter, a jazz festival in the spring, the Brno Music Marathon every August, the Moravian Autumn music festival and a year-round cycle of concerts, opera and ballet (the city is also famous for its atmospheric Christmas Market, unrivalled in Eastern Europe). In 2017 Brno became a part of UNESCO Creative Cities Network as a Music Friendly City.

According to *Lonely Planet*, as a destination Brno 'just keeps getting better and better'. The best way to experience it, for music lovers, is to follow in the famous composer's footsteps courtesy of the system of recently installed panels and plaques. A varied Janáček tour might take in the Vegetable Market (*Zelný trh*), where the composer made recordings of the calls of the market traders to aid his musical settings of the Czech language. It might involve a refreshing beer

in one of his favorite haunts: the cozy Stopka's Pilsner Pub, decorated with art nouveau frescoes by the composer's friend Ladislav Novák.

And where better to stay than at the historic Hotel Slavia, where the composer attended the regular meetings of his own Russian Circle? From here, you're perfectly positioned to take in a performance at the Janáček Theatre (the seat of the opera and ballet ensemble of the National Theatre Brno) or visit the Janáček Memorial in the composer's erstwhile home – the cute cottage built for him in the grounds of

Organ School where he lived for the last 18 years of his life, and wrote many of his masterpieces. No other city contains as many vital physical links to the career of a major opera composer.

Now you can begin your journey even before you've even left home. For basic Brno essentials, visit gotobrna.cz. The refreshed website leosjanacek.eu hosts an inventory of Janáček's life and works, an online boutique featuring artisan gifts and a series of charming new animated films charting the composer's career in three minutes (are you confident enough to try your hand at the Janáček quiz?). After that, Brno and Janáček welcome you – whenever you choose to come. 

A spirit of creative innovation, with a high regard for beauty and elegance, characterises Brno to this day

Booking for the 2020 Janáček Brno festival opens in December:
janacek-brno.cz.

TIC BRNO



GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

David Vickers enjoys a meticulously prepared and exquisitely performed account of Purcell's 1691 opera *King Arthur* from Paul McCreesh



Purcell

King Arthur

Anna Dennis, Mhairi Lawson, Rowan Pierce,

Carolyn Sampson *sops* **Jeremy Budd, James Way**

tens **Roderick Williams** *bar* **Ashley Riches** *bass-bar*

Gabrieli Consort & Players / Paul McCreesh

Winged Lion/Signum ® ② SIGCD589

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Includes synopsis and libretto

The Gabrieli Consort & Players have been developing ideas about *King Arthur* (or *The British Worthy*) for nearly a quarter of a century. Winged Lion's book is illustrated cleverly with photography of quintessentially English landscapes and scenes related to themes in Dryden's words (Cornish tin mines, Stonehenge, North Sea fishermen, cricket on the village green, Morris dancing and a Yorkshire flock of sheep). Numerous writings immerse the reader in the latest Purcell scholarship on the origins of the opera, critical thinking that has informed the new bespoke performing edition by Christopher Suckling and Paul McCreesh, while an admirably clear synopsis explains how Purcell's masques and songs fitted into the play, and six musicians provide insights into their research-informed approaches to performing Purcell's music afresh.

The problematic sources of the music (none of which are autographs) have been reappraised thoroughly. The duet 'You say, 'tis Love' is considered incongruous in its customary position in Act 5 just before the patriotic masque, so it is relocated to the end of Act 4 after the



'Affection and intimacy are hallmarks of a performance that conveys a humane smile'

passacaglia 'How happy the lover'. The usual final song and chorus in praise of St George is not in 17th-century sources and unlikely to be authentic Purcell, so it is replaced by an adaptation of superior music from *Dioclesian* ('Sound Heroes, your brazen trumpets sound', Jeremy Budd's high tenor in dialogue with high-wire solo trumpet). I regret the omission of a few short internal orchestral passages from a couple of songs on grounds that their style is 'untenable' but the oddly interrupting section for strings during Cupid's 'Tis I that have warm'd ye' is repositioned logically into the song's prelude.

Two authentic trumpet tunes are omitted but ample compensation comes from the insertion of a suite from *Amphitryon* (an immediate surprise prior to the usual Overture) and a rondeau from

Distress'd Innocency (it shares rhythmical common ground with its preceding lively chorus 'Come, shepherds, lead up a lively measure'). An air from *Bonduca* segues aptly into two Sirens imploring Arthur to 'come and bathe with us an hour or two' (the hero has his work cut out to resist the beguiling earnestness of Carolyn Sampson and Anna Dennis), and a zesty rondeau from *The Old Bachelor* is interpolated before the masque of British prosperity is inaugurated by Roderick Williams's suave Aeolus ('Ye blust'ring brethren').

The band's use of low pitch (A=392Hz) suits the idiomatic use of high tenors rather than modern countertenors on the alto parts. Playful recorders and chuckling bassoon are



Purcell's fully textured part-writing works beautifully



Paul McCreesh directs the Gabrieli Consort & Players and an outstanding line-up of singers in a performance of Purcell's *King Arthur* that exudes warmth and affection

made to sound as if onstage in 'Shepherd, shepherd, leave decoying' (sung by Dennis and Mhairi Lawson with a sly hint of knowing innuendo), while drums and silver trumpets without modern vent holes sound as if behind the scenery in 'Come if you dare' (sung gregariously by James Way). The precisely balanced string band (three per part) has bass violins on the lowest part instead of cellos (likewise, there is no anachronistic double bass); the use of unwound all-gut strings set up with equal tension and French-style bow holds are vital elements that enhance delightfully subtle string shading. Theorbos, guitars and harpsichord accompany singers without bowed string bass instruments – an approach that provides a whispered discretion to the trio 'For folded flocks' – but seldom play in orchestral pieces; Purcell's fully textured part-writing works beautifully without plucked continuo in the shaded aire that opens Act 2 and the tenderly phrased solo strings that introduce 'Fairest isle' (Sampson's impeccable

declamation of Venus's blessing of Britain replete with lovely embellishments).

The eight soloists with two additional singers form an excellent chorus that is adept in every context, whether depicting heathen sacrifices, quick-fire calls between competing evil and good spirits in 'Hither this way' (Philidel's tricky solo part made to sound easy by Sampson), soft seductiveness in 'How blest are shepherds' (its phrases given plenty of time to breathe by McCreesh) and the gorgeous passacaglia 'How happy the lover'. A quintet of rough-around-the-edges bystanders is roped in for the refrains in 'Your hay it is mow'd', its ringmaster Comus characterised convivially by Williams.

The Frost Scene is given a charming performance by Rowan Pierce's gleeful Cupid and Ashley Riches's thawing Cold Genius; the tempo of the chorus of Cold People 'quiv'ring with cold' is on the slow side. Throughout the opera McCreesh's speeds are relaxed rather than driven – no bad thing, to my mind, and it results in

Dryden's wonderful poetry being acted with personable clarity, and the lucidity of musical gestures ensures that affection and intimacy are hallmarks of a performance that conveys a humane smile. **G**

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	(number of discs	S	Synopsis included
	in set)	s	subtitles included
Ⓢ	SACD (Super	nla	no longer available
	Audio CD)	aas	all available
DVD	DVD Video		separately
Blu-ray	Blu-ray	oas	only available
LP	LP		separately



Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral



Hugo Shirley enjoys a first Strauss recording from Riccardo Chailly:

'The playing, predictably, is stunningly good, the performances superbly taut, concentrated and responsive' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 48**



Lindsay Kemp on an unusual take on Vivaldi's ubiquitous Four Seasons:

'Leila Schayegh reveals her personality while at the same time managing not to make the performance all about her' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 49**

Adams

'The John Adams Album'

Common Tones in Simple Time. Harmonielehre.

Short Ride in a Fast Machine

Montreal Symphony Orchestra / Kent Nagano

Decca © 483 4938 (68' • DDD)



Kent Nagano and the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal's splendid

new disc of John Adams presents three contrasting pieces in their order of composition: *Common Tones in Simple Time*, Adams's first orchestral work, from 1979; the 1985 *Harmonielehre*; and *Short Ride in a Fast Machine* from 1986. Though *Short Ride* is Adams's most-recorded work, I count 10 available recordings of the mighty *Harmonielehre*, a remarkable number for a piece of this vintage and complexity, calling for so large an orchestra. Nagano's longstanding personal and professional relationship with Adams, including conducting the 1991 premiere of *The Death of Klinghoffer* at the Théâtre de la Monnaie, heightens this album's interest and authority.

Suffice it to say that this burnished, energetic, exhilarating *Short Ride* compares with the best of them, with the stunning Montreal brass providing a critical edge. *Common Tones*, with its scrupulously restricted musical means, may well be Adams's most classically 'minimalist' work. Yet already at this stage in his career, his acute sensitivity for orchestral colour and sonority is everywhere in evidence. Nagano and the Montreal players meticulously observe the calibrated nuances on which this work depends. From the first unison sounds, a living musical entity of wondrous beauty emerges with the utmost delicacy over the course of nearly 21 minutes.

Any description of this *Harmonielehre* must begin with the Decca technical team, whose fully dimensional sound reproduction is a model of clarity and spaciousness. Space is the key here: I don't know another piece of music that fills a hall

quite as completely or rapturously as *Harmonielehre*, and this recording is a satisfying facsimile of the experience. If those pounding chords that frame Part 1 sound less aggressive than some other readings, this nevertheless proves to be an extraordinarily robust performance, filled with subtle details and nuance, moving with inexorable power towards its cathartic conclusion. The second movement, 'The Anfortas Wound', is almost a full minute longer than Adams's performance (Berliner Philharmoniker, 1/18), with dark-hued harmonic ambiguities unfolding in savourable leisure. The gently sparkling stars evoked by the tender lullaby that initiates 'Meister Eckhardt and Quackie' gather rhythmically precise momentum, textures undulating with the inevitability of planetary orbits, before exploding in an apotheosis of blazing splendour.

This is heartfelt music-making by a fine orchestra, led by one of the composer's preferred interpreters, resulting in a recording whose sensual sonorities and unabashed spiritual element is likely to disarm even the most hardened sceptics.

Patrick Rucker

Bartók

Violin Concerto No 2, Sz112.

Rhapsodies - No 1, Sz87; No 2, Sz90

Baiba Skride *vn* **WDR Symphony**

Orchestra, Cologne / Eivind Aadland

Orfeo © C950 191 (58' • DDD)



Yet more formidable reportage of what's surely one of the last century's truly great

concertos. Among the finest versions to appear in recent years features Christian Tetzlaff under Hannu Lintu, which won a *Gramophone* Award last year. Barnabas Kelemen and Zoltán Kocsis (Hungaroton) aren't afraid to dirty their feet and their recordings of the two Rhapsodies include fascinating – and in the Second cripplingly difficult – variant versions.

Baiba Skride follows Tetzlaff in toying with extreme dynamics: like him, she reduces her quiet playing to the merest whisper, a glow-worm in the undergrowth, and her sense of colour (witness how she manipulates vibrato) is extremely vivid. But she can be boldly assertive too, while Eivind Aadland's Cologne accompaniment levels with Dorati's (with Menuhin), Kocsis's (Kelemen) or Fischer's (Zehetmair) for keenness of attack. You can tell that there's a real connection going on here, whether in the brazen *tutti* passages or in Skride's handling of the first movement's cadenza. She never baulks at the prospect of using glissando as a folksy expressive device (Bartók's own directive) and tension is maintained throughout all three movements.

The balance between soloist and orchestra is especially well judged and Orfeo's recording never stints on the bass line, especially the bass drum at 9'04" in the first movement, or at the start of the Second Rhapsody's second movement. The concerto's second movement emerges in its true colours, part slow movement, part scherzo, the apparent dichotomy making perfect musical sense. The two Rhapsodies are good too: Aadland really lunges at the opening of the First whereas the more Eastern inflections of the Second Rhapsody's first movement are quite gently handled. Luminosity was obviously an interpretative priority.

A recommendation? Definitely. A top recommendation? A difficult call, that, especially in view of Tetzlaff's excellence (his coupling is a benchmark account of the First Concerto), while the warmly persuasive James Ehnes (Chandos) offers a matchless deal by adding the Viola Concerto to the two violin concertos. I always feel that the 'if-you-stumble-across-this-version-before-any-others ...' type of recommendation is a bit of a cop-out. Of course, it's true, but if you want the best, Tetzlaff and Kelemen are somewhat ahead in the game. Skride isn't quite on their level but her conviction wins through, her actual playing is excellent, Aadland



Infectiously playful: Jan Lisiecki directs the Academy of St Martin in the Fields from the keyboard in Beethoven's five piano concertos

directs a commanding account of the orchestral score and the sound is superb. So why hold back? After all, there should always be room on your shelves for another fine Bartók Second Concerto. **Rob Cowan**

Violin Concerto No 2 – selected comparisons:

Menubin, New PO, Dorati

(9/66^R) (EMI/WARN) 585487-2

Ehnes, BBC PO, Noseda (11/11) (CHAN) CHAN10690

Tetzlaff, Finnish RSO, Lintu (5/18) (ONDI) ODE1317-2

Zehejmair, Budapest Fest Orch, I Fischer (BRIL) 9436

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

Kelemen, Hungarian Nat PO, Kocsis

(10/11) (HUNG) HSACD32509

Beethoven

Complete Piano Concertos

Jan Lisiecki *pf* **Academy of St Martin in the Fields**
DG ④ ③ 483 7637GH3 (174' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Konzerthaus, Berlin,
December 6, 2018



The Canadian pianist Jan Lisiecki has been accorded a distinct honour by DG, the company for whom he has recorded since 2010. His new three-disc set of the five Beethoven concertos with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields was recorded live at the Berlin Konzerthaus last December and is destined for inclusion in DG's

forthcoming 123-disc 'New Complete Beethoven Edition'. It's the sort of project that would be a feather in the cap of a musician of any age, and most certainly is for the 24-year-old Lisiecki, who here records Beethoven for the first time.

Given that these performances were captured, according to the publicity, during rehearsals and performances, their presentation on discs is remarkably sleek and finished. Balances between soloist and orchestra are generally good and ensemble precision, while far from perfect, is laudable, given the absence of a conductor in these challenging scores. (Few pianists today lead from the keyboard as Beethoven did when presenting his concertos.) There are moments when one wishes for greater tension in the music-making, as in the otherwise beautiful dialogue of the Fourth Concerto's slow movement or in the de-clawed *Allegro con brio* of the Third Concerto. Overall, it is the rondos which are most appealing in their infectiously playful abandon. The Rondo of the Fourth Concerto is especially beautiful, with the interplay of soloist and orchestra in sharp focus and just the right blend of *scherzando* agility and lapel-grasping earnestness.

The slow movements, particularly of the first three concertos, are hampered by Lisiecki's still rather limited arsenal of touch strategies, which restrict his expressive range and can render his sound

somewhat shallow. The end result is slow movements, so often the locus of the musical crux in Beethoven, that seem somehow lacking in gravitas. Matters aren't helped by Lisiecki's curious tendency of pulling back at the crown of phrases. There are also odd instances when an unconventional interpretative choice stands out. One is the opening of the Fifth Concerto, at the end of the soloist's third cadenza-like flourish, where Lisiecki shortens the minims of the three cadential chords to crotchets separated by rests. Fortunately these moments are few and far between.

There remains a great deal to enjoy in these performances, their freshness certainly, but perhaps, most of all, their promise of greater things to come.

Patrick Rucker

Beethoven

Piano Concertos – No 1, Op 15; No 2, Op 19.
Rondo, WoO6

Boris Giltburg *pf* **Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra / Vasily Petrenko**
Naxos ④ 8 574151 (74' • DDD)



In most respects these are distinguished readings. Sonically

GRAMOPHONE *Focus*

BEETHOVEN IN VIENNA

Andrew Farach-Colton enjoys a classy new Beethoven symphony cycle from the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra and Andris Nelsons



Andris Nelsons directs at times unpredictable accounts of Beethoven's symphonies

Beethoven

Complete Symphonies

Camilla Nylund *sop* **Gerhild Romberger** *contr*

Klaus Florian Vogt *ten* **Georg Zeppenfeld** *bass*

Vienna Singverein; Vienna Philharmonic

Orchestra / Andris Nelsons

DG (M) (6) (5) + 483 7071GH6

(5h 56' • DDD)



How refreshing that Andris Nelsons comes to the Beethoven symphonies with no discernible interpretative axe to grind. He seems unconcerned with staying on top of the latest trends in historical performance practice, and appears similarly uninterested in reclaiming the mantle of pre-war Central European maestros (à la Thielemann). Yet neither does he steer down the middle of the road. Unpredictable might be a succinct description of Nelsons's interpretative approach. And because he doesn't play

it safe, there are more surprises here than one could reasonably expect from yet another traversal of the Nine.

I was frankly taken aback by the opening chords of the First Symphony, in which Nelsons somehow manages to convey a feeling of eyebrow-raised delight. It's not easy for our jaded ears to appreciate Beethoven's subtle harmonic jape (starting a Symphony in C with immediate detours to F and then G) but it's played so characterfully here that it has its intended pull-the-rug-out effect. And because the subsequent *Allegro* is full of the requisite brio yet doesn't feel at all pushed, and the *Andante cantabile con moto* is relaxed and songful, I was not expecting the Menuetto to be an utterly madcap scramble – faster, even, than the composer's metronome mark. The finale of the Second Symphony also goes at quite a clip, and has the effervescence and zip of an *opera buffa* overture, yet is phrased with such care that its variegated terrain is still revealed with startling clarity (try from 1'54").

In addition to his ability to create audible drama from the harmonic surprises and tensions in Beethoven's music, Nelsons also seems to have an innate sense of its ebb and flow. These help make his reading of the *Eroica* quite an eventful one, full of stark contrasts and an overall sense of exuberant spontaneity. It's also marvellously detailed. Listen, say, at 10'10" in the first movement, where Nelsons really allows the lyrical woodwind theme to breathe and expand, and also to how much care he takes with the *sforzando* accents when the strings take up the melody. The string-playing is glorious throughout, in fact – richly sung and anguished in the *Marcia funebre*, then graciously delicate in the Scherzo, evoking an unexpected air of sylvan wonder. Nelsons takes more daring chances, too, transforming the *Poco andante* of the finale to a full-on *Adagio*, for instance, although it's rendered so tenderly – and provides an expressive foil to the vigour of what surrounds it – that it works.

The contrasts are equally sharp in the Fourth, whose outer movements are quite boisterous – the finale is particularly mirthful – while the *Adagio* is sublime, sometimes breathtaking (try at 2'24"), and so full of incident that it seems almost a world unto itself. Nelsons's supple direction pays huge dividends here. In the Fifth, I have a few misgivings, however. Its opening movement is so astonishingly concise and rhythmically propulsive that it should come at one like a juggernaut – not that it needs to be sped along, mind you. It's more about a steady hand, as Jansons demonstrates in his plain-spoken, immensely powerful recording with the BRSO. Nelsons is slightly too pliant and, as a result, the movement feels unfocused. I'd also prefer greater toughness in the finale. There are hints of it – the knuckling down at 4'57", for example – but the grandeur doesn't always feel so hard-won.

Rattle attempted to inject some grit into the VPO's sound in his first recorded cycle but the orchestra's tonal splendour and refinement is difficult to counteract. Nelsons manages to elicit a hint of rusticity here and there in the *Pastoral*, although even the picture of hearty merrymaking in the third movement is closer to Jules Breton's view of peasant life than Bruegel's. Still, it's a superb performance, with a lovely play of light and shade in 'Scene by the Brook', a 'Storm' that's at its most ferocious in its quietest moments, and a truly heartfelt, paean-like finale. I'm

a bit perplexed as to why Nelsons ignores the first-movement exposition repeat – I, for one, would be delighted to hear such a felicitously phrased reading a second time – as he consistently respects all of the repeats in the first five symphonies. Nor can I fathom why he observes the exposition repeat in the first movement of Eighth but not in the Seventh.

Ironically, Nelsons's Eighth may be the least successful of the set. I like the precise sputtering of the strings in the finale but the *Allegretto scherzando* is stodgy; and while there's plenty of brio in the opening *Allegro vivace e con brio*, it's rather muscle-bound and lacks sparkle. The Seventh, on the other hand, has vivacity to spare. Nelsons almost hits the metronome mark in the third-movement *Presto*, and the VPO take the turbocharged tempo in their stride, seeming to revel in its giddiness. The finale is also fast-paced – not as fleet or as clear as Karajan in his last Berlin cycle – but thrilling in its own right.

The Ninth is splendid, for the most part. Nelsons is patient and exploratory in the first and third movements, making the most of the music's extraordinary variety of weight, texture and emotional temperature (try at 13'48" in the first and at 12'45" in the third), and the natural gait he finds for the *Molto vivace* gives it a sense of galloping inevitability. The finale begins promisingly. I very much like how the first appearance of the great D major theme sounds like it's hummed by the cellos and double basses (Nelsons turning Beethoven's *piano* marking into a *pianississimo*). But the vocal quartet has a woolly start and the tenor's choppy, rushed phrasing nearly spoils the *alla marcia*. Nelsons pulls it together after that, however, and the remaining sections gather considerable strength.

I can't think of another cycle quite as volatile as this – not even Bernstein's. There's nothing in the least tentative or routine here. And even when Nelsons's interpretative gambles don't pay off, there's never any doubt that he's all in. The VPO follow him with ferocious dedication every step of the way. **G**

Selected comparisons:

VPO, Bernstein (2/81^R) (DG) 483 7393GM6

BPO, Karajan (6/86^R) (DG) 439 200-2

VPO, Rattle (2/03^R) (EMI/WARN)

457573-2 or 915624-2

VPO, Thielemann (4/12) (SONY) 88697 92717-2

Bavarian RSO, Jansons (12/13) (BRKL) 900119

speaking, the judicious balance between piano and orchestra conveys a palpable chamber-like aesthetic that brings important woodwind details to the fore, such as the interweaving clarinet and horn parts in the First Concerto's *Largo*. This can also be attributed to Vasily Petrenko's penchant for the kind of lean, transparent textures, rhythmic spring and regimented ensemble values one hears in Beethoven concerto cycles from Szell/Cleveland, Zinman/Zurich Tonhalle and Dausgaard/Swedish Chamber Orchestra. My only issues with Petrenko's firmly delineated and profiled support concerns instances where the strings seem underpowered and lacking in requisite heft (particularly in the central movements' slow and sustained passages), along with the conductor's tendency to pull back at certain climaxes and to taper phrase endings, an annoying period-performance mannerism that seems to have stuck.

Boris Giltburg's polished and cultivated pianism shines in the crystalline scales of the First Concerto's *Allegro* and in how he shapes his solo in the development section (starting at 7'02") so that the phrases sweetly sing over the bar lines. If Giltburg isn't so rabble-rousing and angular as Yefim Bronfman or Leon Fleisher in the Rondo finale, he compensates with witty turns of phrase, such as the buoyant broken octaves and the conversational exchanges between hands (bars 89-118, around 1'14"), and the roundness and definition of his staccatos in the A minor theme.

If anything, the B flat Second Concerto's outer movements elicit more inspired and scampering soloist/ensemble interplay. I especially like Giltburg's slightly studied yet imaginatively nuanced parsing of the first-movement cadenza's fierce counterpoint, and his attention to the accompaniment's inner voices in the *Adagio*. The stand-alone Rondo in B flat was Beethoven's original ending for the Second Concerto, and why this delightful, unpredictable work is not a regular concert staple is a mystery. Giltburg and Petrenko revel in the work's disarming humour and magical transitions, serving up its most captivating recording since the venerable Julius Katchen/Piero Gamba version (Decca, 5/59). Giltburg's enthusiasm spills over into his informative booklet notes, where he gives plausible reasons for choosing the shorter of Beethoven's two completed cadenzas for the C major Concerto's first movement. **Jed Distler**

Bruckner

Symphony No 7 (ed Nowak)

NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra / Alan Gilbert

Sony Classical © 19075 97953-2 (66' • DDD)



This recording of Bruckner's Seventh Symphony has been released to

coincide with the start of Alan Gilbert's tenure as principal conductor of the NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra, and for the most part a very commendable version it is. Gilbert conducted a number of Bruckner symphonies during his time as music director of the New York Philharmonic and secures playing of considerable eloquence from his new orchestra, an ensemble whose previous principal conductors have included such distinguished Brucknerians as Wand, Eschenbach and Dohnányi. The concluding part of the *Adagio* is especially moving, horns and Wagner tubas voiced with impressive unanimity and depth, and the performance by the solo flute imbued with an otherworldly poignancy. The Scherzo is also extremely persuasive, combining rhythmic buoyancy with inner clarity and a real sense of power.

Gilbert's navigation of the symphonic structure, using the Nowak edition of the score, is clear-sighted and purposeful. He includes the cymbal clash in the *Adagio*, though disregards many of the *ritardando* and *a tempo* markings that Nowak includes in the finale. I would have preferred the very end of the symphony, which is given a rather stately presentation, to have a bit more more zest and feeling of exhilaration. Somewhat surprisingly for a production made under studio conditions, a few small errors in ensemble have been left unedited. There's also a sudden and puzzling increase in the loudness of the *ff tutti* passage in bar 67 of the Scherzo (0'54"), as if a gain control had been briefly turned up at this point. Aside from these issues, the engineering is both vivid and rather plush, benefiting from the first-rate acoustics of the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg.

Christian Hoskins

Coates

'Orchestral Works, Vol 1'

Ballad, Op 2. By the Sleepy Lagoon. Dancing

Nights. The Jester at the Wedding - Suite.

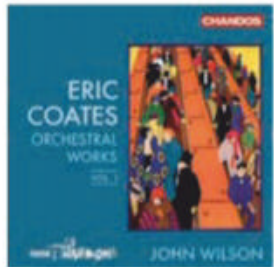
London (London Everyday). The Merry-makers:

A Miniature Overture. Two Symphonic

Rhapsodies

BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / John Wilson

Chandos © CHAN20036 (71' • DDD)



When I was a youngster Eric Coates's worst fears were being realised, in other words (and here I quote him) that 'wrong attitudes towards the best light music [were fostering] an insidious form of musical snobbery among listeners, teaching them to despise melody'. Coates died when I was nine years old but already his presence was writ large in my musical imagination, principally through *By a Sleepy Lagoon* (via the BBC's *Desert Island Discs*) and Coates's many superb 78s, all of which have been restored to circulation on CD by Nimbus (10/13). But if you want the best possible match for Coates's own rostrum wizardry – like Elgar, he kept his own music very much on the move – then you couldn't do better than John Wilson, whose discography now includes by my reckoning three all-Coates CDs, of which this is the finest, and certainly the best-recorded.

The closing section of 'Knightsbridge' – which incidentally at 4'18" matches the timing for Coates's own New Symphony Orchestra recording exactly – vies with the final pages of Elgar's *Cockaigne* for grandeur, something that had never occurred to me until I heard this version. The three-tier *London* sequence is a jewel in light music's crown, and one of the high points of my career was a decade or so ago when I joined Wilson, Frances Fyfield and other guests (including handwriting expert Ruth Rostrom) while inspecting the manuscript of *London* for the BBC Radio 4 programme *Tales from the Stage*.

As for Wilson, what he doesn't know about the inner workings of Coates's methods isn't worth knowing; and just as he has approximated the playing styles of American orchestras under the likes of Paul Weston and Nelson Riddle, so he has resurrected the warmth and vitality of our own finest vintage light orchestras. The music itself is incomparable. Who could resist the varied colours in *The Jester at the Wedding*, the Tchaikovskian strains of the early *Ballad* (1904) or *Dancing Nights* (fade up to the transition at 5'14" to hear the Wilson magic at its most seductive)? And could any sensitive listener turn a deaf ear to the *Two Symphonic Rhapsodies* of 1933, even if the second of them, consisting of 'Bird Songs at Eventide' and 'I heard you singing', could be jokingly daubed as 'Delius for Dummies' (and by that I mean no disrespect to either composer)? Nothing more to say really, save to voice my sincere impatience for Vol 2 and, hopefully, the

volumes that will follow that. Our own Richard Bratby has contributed first-rate booklet notes. **Rob Cowan**

Elgar • Chadwick

Chadwick Tam O'Shanter **Elgar** Falstaff, Op 68
Timothy West, Samuel West, Erik Chapman, Billy Wiz *spkrs* BBC National Orchestra of Wales / **Andrew Constantine**

Orchid Ⓢ (two discs for the price of one)
ORC100103 (107' • DDD)



Ever wondered what would happen if you broke Elgar's *Falstaff* into several sections and inserted readings from Shakespeare's *Henry IV*? Andrew Constantine and the BBC NOW have done exactly that, and with some style: who wouldn't want to hear actors as fine as Timothy and Samuel West playing the fat knight and Prince Hal? But still, the question remains: do you really want to hear them interrupting Elgar's *Falstaff*?

It's not as logical an idea as it sounds. As Elgar explained to Donald Tovey, almost every musical idea and incident in *Falstaff* is directly linked to a specific phrase, character or image in Shakespeare. The full programme is literally impossible to incorporate in performance, and the broadly apposite readings chosen here can't come close to illustrating the full complexity of Elgar's characterisation. Nor is the recorded speech particularly clear.

Happily, Orchid has included a second disc on which *Falstaff* is played straight through: a striding, symphonic account by a conductor who clearly loves and understands the work, played with polish and flair. The solo bassoon before the Dream Interlude is charmingly drowsy; the swagger and brilliance of the climactic coronation procession sets hairs on end.

Inconveniently (at least if you still prefer to listen on CD), the pairing – the ebullient and colourful symphonic poem *Tam O'Shanter* by the turn-of-the-century Boston Romantic William Chadwick – is included on the same disc as the interrupted *Falstaff* (thankfully, Chadwick's Burns-inspired programme note is merely read out before the performance, rather than interpolated). It's a gorgeous piece of late-Romantic tartanry, and Constantine's big-hearted performance easily rivals Neeme Järvi's Detroit version (Chandos, 6/96^R) for character, pace and colour. A curious sort of release, then, but ultimately the music wins through – just as it should.

Richard Bratby

Falla

El Amor brujo^a. *El sombrero de tres picos*^b

^b**Carmen Romeu** *mez*^a **Marina Heredia** *cantaora*

Mahler Chamber Orchestra / Pablo Heras-Casado

Harmonia Mundi Ⓢ HMM90 2271 (62' • DDD • T/t)



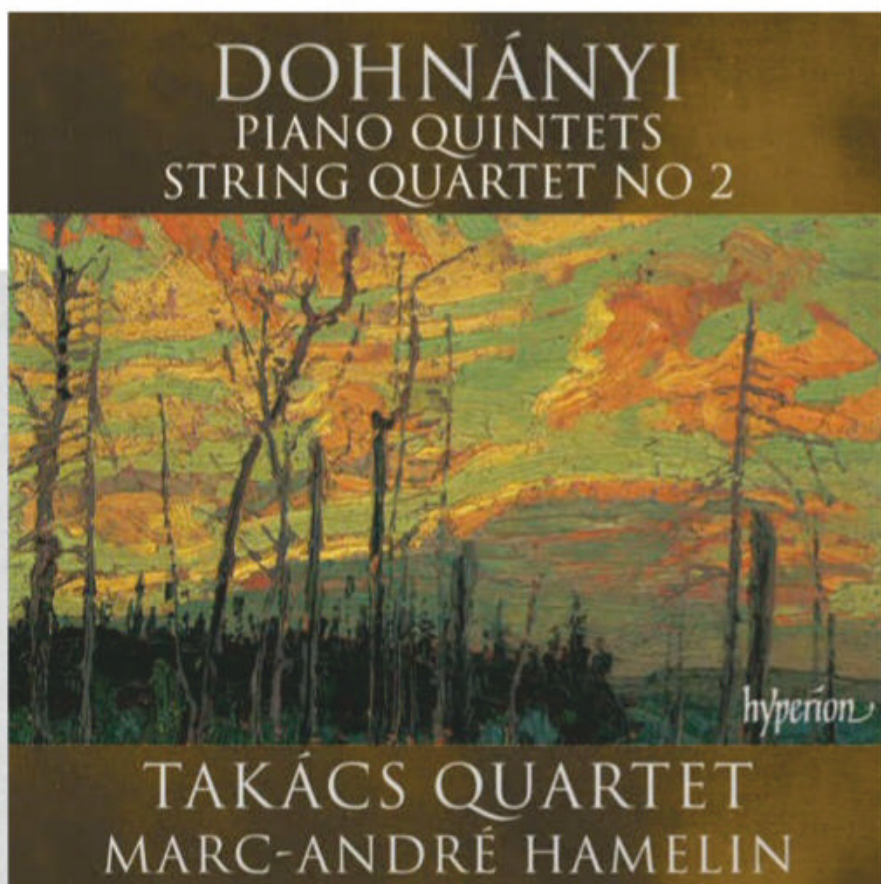
El sombrero de tres picos was first performed by Diaghilev's Ballets Russes at London's

Alhambra Theatre in the summer of 1919, so this new recording from Harmonia Mundi is very much intended as a centenary celebration. In a booklet note, Pablo Heras-Casado expresses his admiration for the score, and indeed for Falla's output in general, and asks that we consider it alongside *Petrushka*, *Daphnis et Chloé* and late Debussy as some of the most original music of the 20th century. Few, I suspect, would disagree, but what's really unmistakable here is the enthusiasm with which he conducts it, and the sheer exhilaration of the response he elicits from the Mahler Chamber Orchestra.

He gives us a high-voltage interpretation, rich in detail, and strong on dramatic and narrative momentum. Rhythms are wonderfully precise, textures very sensuous throughout, the latter helped immeasurably by the vivid, immediate recording, though it also catches the occasional in-breath from Heras-Casado in moments of excitement. The fanfares and shouts of '¡Olé!' that form the effective prelude set the tone with their energy and panache. The big set pieces – the Miller's Farruca, his Wife's Fandango – have tremendous fire, and the elation of the final Jota is irresistible, though equally striking is Heras-Casado's relaxed treatment of the Seguidillas at the start of scene 2, when the Corregidor is out of the way and danger temporarily averted. It's a superb achievement that more than holds its own beside the versions by Frühbeck de Burgos and Dutoit, both widely regarded as benchmarks.

Heras-Casado's interpretation of *E Amor brujo*, in contrast, is comparatively reflective, if at times remarkably intense – closer, perhaps, to Giulini's reined-in approach than to Dutoit's more extrovert flamboyance. We're more overtly aware of Falla's Russian and French influences here, both in the brooding echoes of the opening of *Firebird* in the evocation of the Gypsy encampment near the start, and the swaying, Ravelian Pantomima, where the MCO strings sound very sensual and the mood is seductive in the extreme.

hyperion



The celebrated partnership of Marc-André Hamelin and the Takács Quartet has already set down reference recordings of piano quintets by Schumann, Franck and Shostakovich, and this latest addition is equally illustrious: an important milestone in the critical re-evaluation of the work of Ernő Dohnányi.

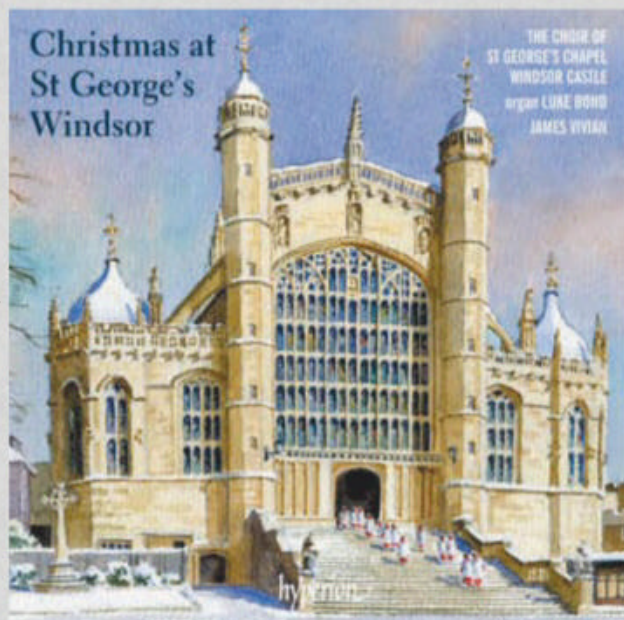
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Available Friday 1 November 2019

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Available Friday 1 November 2019

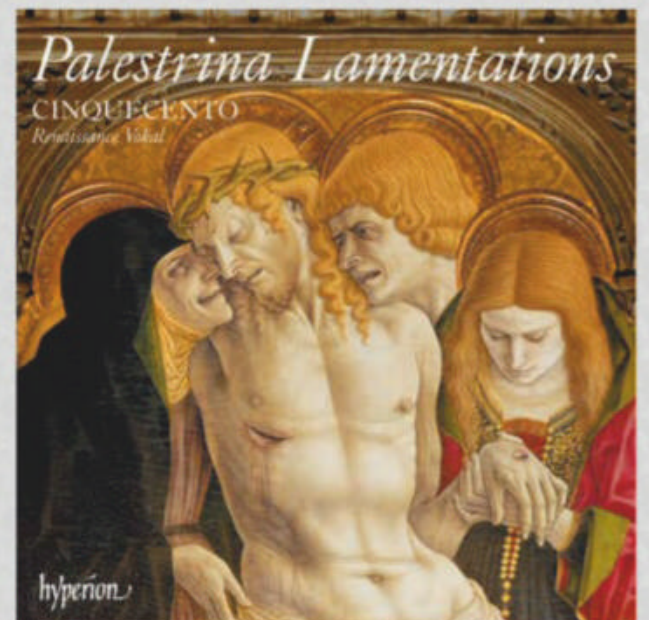
Christmas at St George's Windsor
ST GEORGE'S CHAPEL CHOIR, WINDSOR CASTLE
JAMES VIVIAN conductor



The members of Cinquecento turn to perhaps the pre-eminent composer of the sixteenth century: Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina.

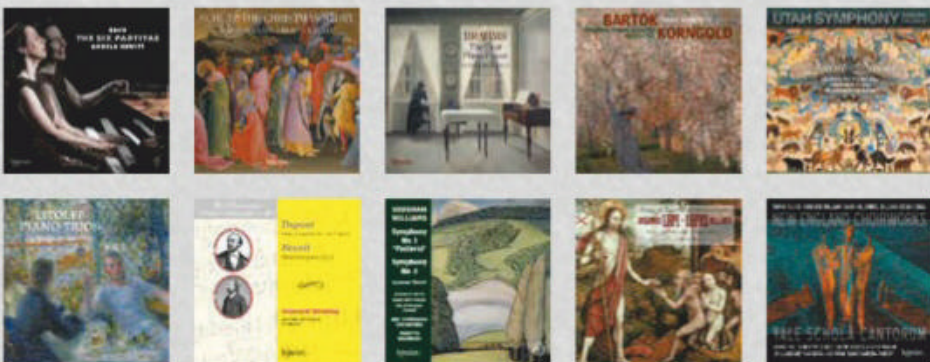
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Palestrina: Lamentations
CINQUECENTO



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Schütz: The Christmas story & other works Yale Schola Cantorum, David Hill (conductor)
Vaughan Williams: Symphonies Nos 3 & 4 BBC Symphony Orchestra, Martyn Brabbins (conductor)
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Christmas
THE GESUALDO SIX
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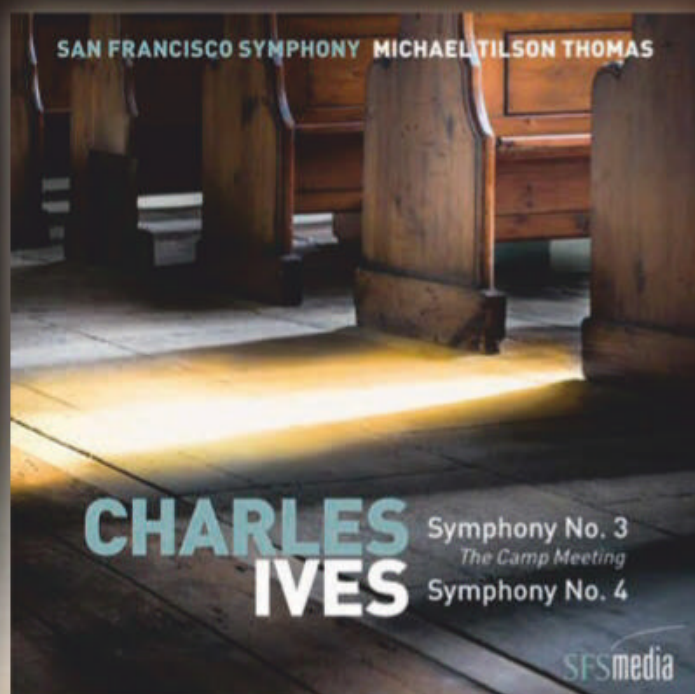
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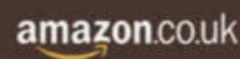
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GRAMOPHONE *talks to ...**Louis Langrée*

The music director of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra discusses their latest recording, including the original version of Gershwin's *An American in Paris*

You've included the familiar version of *An American in Paris*, with the cuts Gershwin made, and an unabridged version that restores 104 bars of music. How did this project come about?

I became aware of Mark Clague's new Urtext Edition through a *New York Times* article, 'Have we been playing Gershwin wrong for 70 years?' This essay showed a 1929 photo of George Gershwin alongside the principal percussionist of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra holding the four taxi horns that the composer brought for the concerts. According to Mark, this image proves that the taxi horn parts have been played wrongly since the 1940s, when *An American in Paris* was first published, having been revised and arranged by Frank Campbell-Watson. We are honoured to give the first recording of the George & Ira Gershwin Critical Edition – both the original and abridged versions. I have loved being a part of this unique experience, and it has been a very special privilege to benefit from Mark's knowledge and expertise.

What main differences to the work can we expect from this restored music?

Before reading the new Critical Edition, I had no idea how much Frank Campbell-Watson's standard arrangement of *An American in*

Paris, created five years after Gershwin's death, had distorted the original masterpiece. For instance, Campbell-Watson added many slurs, transforming the original crisp articulations into a more lush texture. He softened Gershwin's intended dissonances as if they were misprints, and added heavy percussion and timpani rolls. He also simplified the saxophone parts, having three saxophonists playing one instrument each, instead of Gershwin's original three saxophonists playing a total of eight instruments, including a trio of soprano saxophones. The originality and transparency of Gershwin's original composition, orchestration and articulations has been restored in this new edition.

What inspired the couplings of Varèse and Stravinsky on this recording?

The 'Transatlantic' title reflects the mutual fascination and inspiration between the Old World and the New. I wanted to contrast and complement these experiences. Alongside Gershwin's evocative tone poem, we present abstract music with Stravinsky's *Symphony in C*, which was composed half in France and half in the US. Stravinsky said that some passages of the last movement would have



been 'perfect movie music for a Hollywood traffic scene' where we view 'the neon glitter of the California boulevards from a speeding automobile'.

Since its inception, the Cincinnati SO has had a deep tradition of inviting composers to perform their own work. Stravinsky, Gershwin and Varèse each performed with the CSO between 1918 and 1965. Stravinsky conducted his own *Symphony in C*, Gershwin supervised the 1929 CSO performance of *An American in Paris* and Varèse led the CSO in 1918, which was right before he started composing *Amériques*. This tradition continues into the present with composers like John Adams, Bryce Dessner, Caroline Shaw and Matthias Pintscher. What better way to celebrate the CSO's 125th season than with a recording of composers who were deeply connected to the orchestra?

There's bravura playing in the *Ritual Fire Dance*, which is pungent, weighty and rather sinister, though Heras-Casado firmly places the emotional climax at the end, as the *Dance of the Game of Love* and subsequent sunrise chase the phantoms and terrors of night away. His flamenco singer is Marina Heredia, her voice raspy, lived-in and knowing, her way with the text impeccable. Some might still prefer Dutoit's greater bravado in this work but Heras-Casado, nevertheless, gives us another outstanding performance that ranks among the best. **Tim Ashley**

El sombrero de tres picos – selected comparison:

Frühbeck de Burgos (11/64^R, 2/76^R) (WARN) ➔ 237595-2

El Amor brujo – selected comparison:

Giulini (9/66^R) (WARN) ➔ 237595-2

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

Dutoit (8/83) (DECC) 410 008-2DH

Gershwin • Stravinsky • Varèse

'Transatlantic'

Gershwin *An American in Paris* (two recordings)

Stravinsky *Symphony in C* **Varèse** *Amériques*

Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra / Louis Langrée

Fanfare Cincinnati Ⓢ Ⓜ FC016 (93' • DDD)



Here's the recording premiere of a new critical edition of Gershwin's *An American in Paris*, and it's given in two performances: one that reinstates 104 bars excised from the score published in 1929 and the other in its familiar form without. Actually, those 104 bars can be heard on a Naxos recording by Gerard Schwarz and the Seattle Symphony, although without

the new editorial emendations (presumably Schwarz was working from the facsimile edition published in the 1980s). The missing bars were cut in four chunks from the score's final minutes and show Gershwin drawing various melodic strands together and putting them into new (and surprisingly daring) harmonic contexts. Although it's only two and a half minutes of extra music in total, these bars alter the work's dramatic arc. As for the textural changes, many are minor and deal with matters of phrasing and articulation but some are quite audible – particularly the corrected pitches of the car horns, which are more picturesquely cacophonous, and the saxophone parts, which were greatly simplified when the work was originally edited for publication by Frank Campbell-Watson.

In an extensive interview printed in the CD booklet, Louis Langrée says that he studied Gershwin's piano roll as well as the 1929 recording by Nathaniel Shilkret and the Victor Symphony Orchestra (with the composer playing celesta), and tried to avoid making it swing too hard because 'swing arrives in the '40s, not in the '20s when ragtime is the predominant style'. And rightly so. In fact, his interpretation is exceptionally clear (the crystalline recorded sound helps a great deal), and dances and shimmies without getting carried away. Some may find it a tad cool, but I rather like its air of Parisian elegance.

The couplings, playing on the 'transatlantic' theme, are inspired. Langrée's reading of the original 1922 version of Varèse's *Amérique* may not be as joyously wild as Ludovic Morlot's from Seattle (on that orchestra's in-house label), but it still has gobs of character. I love the toreador-like swagger of the strings beginning at 8'03", for example, and the feral élan of the brass in the *Sacre*-esque fanfares at 12'58". Indeed, Langrée has the Cincinnati Symphony playing at an extremely high level, and this is perhaps most evident in Stravinsky's Symphony in C (composed half in France and half in the US). Truth be told, there haven't been too many wholly successful recordings of this exceedingly tricky work, and this is the best in a long while. Crisply articulated, rhythmically alert and charmingly tart, it also abounds in expressive detail. Listen to the *Larghetto concertante*, where one can discern a subtle lamenting quality beneath its ornate classical facade – a reminder that Stravinsky wrote this following the deaths of his wife, daughter and mother. I only wish Langrée had the winds play the Symphony's last chords *pianissimo*, as written, but the effect is still extremely moving.

Anyone who loves Gershwin's evergreen score should hear this revelatory recording. The entire programme has already given me many hours of pleasure. Urgently recommended.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Mahler

Symphony No 6

SWR Symphony Orchestra, Baden-Baden and Freiburg / Michael Gielen

SWR Classic © ③ SWR19080CD (173' • DDD)

Two performances: studio version recorded 1971; live version from the Grosses Festspielhaus, Salzburg, August 21, 2013

Includes 'Was Mahler religious' – excerpt from a 2001 interview with Michael Gielen



Summing up Wilhelm Furtwängler's wartime concerts

in Berlin (5/19) I found reason to refer to Michael Gielen's valedictory appearance at the Salzburg Festival. Here it is, though had Furtwängler ever addressed himself to Mahler's Sixth Symphony, it's a fair bet that it would have sounded nothing like this. Gielen came to believe that he (and presumably everyone else) had been conducting the symphonies much too quickly, and the first movement's *energico* marking is experienced here, through the course of a patience-testing 28 minutes, less as a determined march past classical forms, face set against the wind, and more as a struggle between life and death, past and future, that counterbalances the vast narrative of the finale.

Stick with him. Gielen was far too canny a conductor to allow momentum to sag, and at any given moment he knew exactly which voice to highlight in Mahler's panoptic canvas to lead the ear onwards. Even before he assumed directorship of the Baden-Baden and Freiburg orchestra in 1986 he had been working with them for decades, nurturing a Mahler tradition first established by their founding conductor, Hans Rosbaud. There is no shortage of poise or brilliance about the playing here, over and above the expected level of dedication which lends the performance a palpable sense of occasion. Try the horn solo floated over the 'Alma' theme (16'15") in the first movement's Alpine interlude or the succeeding string tremolos where each change of harmony takes on a significance beyond the reach of more impetuous interpreters.

By 2013 Gielen had also changed his mind about the sequence of the middle movements, which now follow the increasingly orthodox ordering, backed by scholarship, of *Andante*-Scherzo. Not that this places the radio recording from 1971 in the shade. The earlier account is much rougher as well as swifter, with tempo contrasts inevitably compressed in the Scherzo, but the rubato and portamento warming the lyric themes here and in the *Andante* place the reading within a broad stream of Mahler performance flowing from Oskar Fried to Vladimir Jurowski.

The 2013 concert is something else. 'Many a time a fragrance of ancestral Schubert rises from the deeps', wrote the pianist-composer Zygmunt Stojowski in a 1916 tribute to Mahler, and it may seem

paradoxical that it took modernists and fellow composers such as Bruno Maderna to fully grasp this aspect of his music. In doing so, Gielen raises the changing metres of the Scherzo above parody and holds the finale together with the kind of unfolding logic we might more readily associate with the *Unfinished* Symphony.

The booklet gives invaluable background to both performances, each of them quite different to the Sixth from 1999 previously published as part of a complete cycle from Hänssler (4/02). There is also a transcription and translation of the closing interview, though one needs no German to understand Gielen's closing, sardonic laughter as both typical of the man and a Mahlerian gesture in its own right.

Peter Quantrill

Mozart

Piano Concertos – No 17, K453; No 24, K491

Orli Shaham *pf*

St Louis Symphony Orchestra / David Robertson

Canary © CC18 (59' • DDD)

Mozart

Piano Concertos – No 17, K453; No 24, K491

Benjamin Hochman *pf*

English Chamber Orchestra

Avie © AV2404 (59' • DDD)



The G major and C minor Piano Concertos were last paired on disc by Lang Lang and Nikolaus Harnoncourt in performances whose considerable parts added up to a curiously frustrating whole. These two new couplings display, in their very different ways, a clearer and more satisfying symbiosis. (The link between the two works is that K453 and K491 are the only ones in the cycle that conclude with theme-and-variation movements.)

Orli Shaham's disc is a family affair, being conducted by her husband and issued on her brother's label, while Benjamin Hochman directs the ECO, an ensemble with a long-established Mozartian heritage, although one with which he doesn't appear to have collaborated previously. If pushed to reduce one's feelings on the two discs to a simple formula, it might be that Shaham and Robertson work in pastels, Hochman in primary colours. There's more to it than that, of course, but the St Louis disc offers a more reactive take on the G major work (K453) especially, treating the concertos explicitly as close cousins to the operas.

Hochman, on the other hand, appears to approach them rather as showpieces, more inclined to play across the music's junctions than to respond to the drama implied by a change of texture, tonality or mood.

This is perhaps as much a result of the recordings as of the performances. Avie's microphones home in closer on Hochman's piano and the woodwinds than Canary's for Shaham. And what woodwinds the ECO contains: the booklet does not list them but they are clearly among the finest London has to offer. In Hochman's hands K453 is a more genial work than the subtly nuanced piece Shaham and Robertson reveal it to be. Hochman nevertheless responds more acutely to the shadings of the C minor Concerto (K491). Both approaches are appealing: Hochman channelling Mozart the showman, Shaham revealing his theatrical sensitivity to the connotations of a dramatic situation. If Hochman's is perhaps the less complex course, it impresses for its eager charm, while Shaham's hints at the cloud behind the silver lining.

Both pianists adopt Mozart's cadenzas for K453 but diverge in their choices for the first movement of K491, for which no authentic cadenza survives. Hochman devises his own, while Shaham opts for one by Saint-Saëns, which she learnt at an early age by ear from a recording by Robert Casadesu with the Cleveland Orchestra under George Szell (now on Sony, 7/65). Perhaps this displays the greater personality – but it's Saint-Saëns's personality rather than Mozart's, whether genuine or contrived. Nevertheless, it's a further attraction that might influence a choice between these two engaging discs.

David Threasher

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

Lang, VPO, Harmoncourt (10/14) (SONY) 88843 08253-2

Rachmaninov

'Destination Rachmaninov – Arrival'

Piano Concertos^a – No 1, Op 1; No 3, Op 30^b.

The Bells, Op 35 – The Silver Sleigh Bells^c.

Vocalise, Op 34 No 14 (both transcr Trifonov)

Daniil Trifonov *pf*^a **The Philadelphia**

Orchestra / Yannick Nézet-Séguin

DG 483 6617; ② 483 6618 (82' • DDD)

Recorded live at ^bVerizon Hall, Philadelphia, April 2018; ^cPhilharmonie, Berlin, February 2019



Trifonov's Rachmaninov is unlike anyone else's. Whether that's down to wilfulness and self-regard or individuality and integrity is open to

debate. My balance sheet comes out positive, largely thanks to sheer pianistic mastery, but it's not without some serious entries on the debit side.

In the First Concerto he bursts out of the gates with terrific panache, and Nézet-Séguin and the Philadelphia Orchestra, doubtless proud of the orchestra's long association with the composer, do not hold back either, with plenty of old-fashioned portamento and plushly upholstered texturing. This concerto is, in Trifonov's own conception, 'impatient music', and he suits his actions to the words. I love the energy, the onward-thrusting momentum, the sheer impact, which make the whole thing distinctive yet at the same time true to the composer's youthful bravado. There's tremendous verve and dash in the finale, too, which the score clearly invites – particularly if you go with the original *Allegro scherzando* rather than the *Allegro vivace* of the revision.

Whether Trifonov's opening solo in the slow movement strays over the border between expressive and self-indulgent maybe a personal matter. But it does seem mean not to give credit to piano tone this gorgeous and to phrasing this spacious. His Steinway – supplied by the orchestra, according to the booklet – may be on the metallic side in the treble but it's not beyond tolerable limits, for me at least.

The Third Concerto is an interesting mixture of easing back and forward, sometimes in odd places: again, not to all tastes, and not to be measured against some imaginary ideal, but better just savoured for its individuality – which isn't all that hard given the commanding nature of Trifonov's technique, the patent sincerity of his expressed views on Rachmaninov and the burnished sheen on the Philadelphia sound. To make the slow movement so languorous, then so blustery, is perhaps to reinforce the already obvious, but in its own terms it is once again fabulously done. The central section rather downplays the usual fireworks, but Trifonov could always counter that the marking is only *poco più mosso*. In the finale the outer sections have some electrifying touches of speed and colour, calculated to amaze and duly succeeding. Even these are not without touches of point-scoring vulgarity, though, and in the long, becalmed central phase Trifonov stretches the line to breaking point. Nézet-Séguin performs some minor miracles in holding everything together.

As for the fillers, Trifonov's transcription of the first movement from the choral symphony *The Bells* is resourceful, I suppose, and in line with his booklet interview on the importance of bells to

Rachmaninov. But the sound is seriously over-resonant. And is he playing *fortissimo* with soft pedal, I wonder? Or tweaking the hammers to help him evoke bells? The *Vocalise*, on the other hand, is curiously subdued at first; then, just as curiously, the tone hardens as the texture grows. I know ... it beats me. I sense Trifonov is outgrowing his youthful excesses, but it will take a while yet to complete the process.

The concerto recordings, I should say, are fine, particularly if you don't mind sacrificing some orchestral lines for the sake of hearing every note in the piano part. As Jeremy Nicholas noted in the Second and Fourth Concertos (11/18), the moody photographs of Trifonov with historic English trains and the title 'Destination Rachmaninov' do nothing to enhance the attractions of the disc. Still, if it's glamour you want, both the playing and the production supply it in full measure. **David Fanning**

Saariaho

Circle Map. Graal Théâtre^a.

Neiges. Vers toi qui es si loin^a

^a**Peter Herresthal** *vn* **Oslo Philharmonic**

Orchestra / Clément Mao-Takacs

BIS ② BIS2402 (87' • DDD/DSD)



Kaija Saariaho (b1952) has come a fair way since the works that

established her reputation in the mid-1980s, where the presence of electronics facilitated an opening-up of instrumental texture that made her so distinctive a figure. The late 1990s brought changing priorities, and this disc illustrates those changes and her underlying consistency of idiom over two decades.

Graal Théâtre (1994) is the climax of her initial phase. Here the violin's soloistic role ensures an oppositional momentum over its half-hour span: the first movement moves from recitative gestures to an expressive 'quest' that intensifies after withdrawing to near-silence, whereas its successor defines this conflict more graphically and its climactic cadenza brings a transition back to the mood of the opening. Medieval imagery is more explicit in *Vers toi qui es si loin*, a recent arrangement of the final aria from her opera *L'amour de loin* (2000) whose notion of a journey – whether spiritual or physical – finds fulfilment in music alive with timbral nuance.

Neiges (1998) recalls Saariaho's earlier abstraction, the textural density and finesse of these five études abetted by the increase

from eight to 12 cellos in this transcription. Yet it is *Circle Map* (2012) that leaves the greatest impression. Its six sections are inspired by the poet Rumi, whose ‘voice’ emerges dematerialised as an electronic component embedded in the orchestral fabric; a synthesis at its most visceral in the layered rhythmic activity of the third section or harmonic amplitude of the fifth, before a close whose remoteness borders on the intangible.

Performances could scarcely be bettered. Peter Herresthal finds greater expressive variety in *Graal Théâtre* than Gidon Kremer (the only other account with full orchestra), with Clément Mao-Takacs making more of those emotional contrasts in *Circle Map* than Susanna Mälkki. The Oslo Philharmonic evince all the clarity and fastidiousness this music requires, heard to advantage in an opulent yet well-defined acoustic. Disc and booklet are presented in BIS’s current Ekopak format, which looks as stylish as the music contained within is compelling.

Richard Whitehouse

Graal Théâtre – selected comparison:

Kremer, BBC SO, Salonen (A/01) (SONY) SK60817

Circle Map – selected comparison:

RCO, Mälkki (9/14) (RCOL) RCO14001

Sawer

‘Rumpelstiltskin’

April\March. Cat’s-Eye. Rumpelstiltskin Suite

Birmingham Contemporary Music Group /

Martyn Brabbins

NMC © NMCD251 (75’ • DDD)



David Sawer describes his *Rumpelstiltskin* – referencing the typically macabre and moralistic Grimms’ fairy tale of that name – as ‘a grotesque fable for our times’. The 27-minute suite he drew in 2011 from his 70-minute score conveys uninhibited grotesquerie through obsessive rhythmic patterning and boldly differentiated instrumental colouring, brass to the fore, with an ending as hair-raisingly harsh and menacing as the sudden appearance of Petrushka’s ghost at the end of Stravinsky’s ballet. This performance by BCMG under Martyn Brabbins – recorded with pin-sharp clarity in Birmingham’s CBSO Centre – could hardly be more vivid, the metric mechanisms laying down the perfect framework for the music’s volatile harmonic excursions and textural polarities.

The two works following the *Rumpelstiltskin Suite* on the disc were written 30 years apart but both show

how fruitful Sawer’s long association with things theatrical has been. *Cat’s-Eye* (1986) is not a hymn in praise of road markings but alludes to a device within a magic lantern able to project – according to Sawer – ‘fantastic images of spirits and demons’. *April\March* (2016) draws its own fantastic musical images from a story by Jorge Luis Borges in which ‘April March’ (no back-slash) is a fictional novel by a fictional writer, built around what Borges describes as regressive, ramified storytelling, its narrative reaching back as inexorably as it moves forwards. Hearing the two works in quick succession, it’s clear that *Cat’s-Eye* has a more expressionistic kind of intensity, a relish for the darker side of fragmentation, while *April\March* is more laid-back, more lyrical, searching for continuities as well as contrasts. However, these qualities don’t result in any lack of intensity or less strength of character; as the end approaches the music surges to a strongly asserted point of closure.

That *April\March* has been used for a ballet called *Blue Moon* (not based on Borges) adds a further level of intriguing ambiguity to Sawer’s satisfyingly surreal musical world. This disc – a pity the individual BCMG players could not be named in the booklet – is a splendid addition to his recorded repertoire. The sooner one or more of his operas appears, the better. **Arnold Whittall**

Schubert

‘The Complete Symphonies, Vol 2’

Symphonies – No 1, D82; No 3, D200;

No 8, ‘Unfinished’, D759

The Hague Residentie Orchestra /

Jan Willem de Vriend

Challenge Classics © CC72802

(74’ • DDD/DSD)



It barely feels as long ago as February that the first volume in Jan Willem de Vriend’s Schubert symphony cycle arrived among a considerable handful of recordings of this repertoire. That disc juxtaposed the *Tragic* (No 4) with the perkier Second Symphony, pointing up the contrast in mood between the two works. The new one fills in the gaps, presenting the youthful First and Third Symphonies – works in which Schubert’s voice is heard emerging from the clear influence of his Viennese forebears and contemporaries – and appending the Eighth, in which, of course, the voice is, for the first time in his orchestral music, entirely Schubert’s own.

That February round-up featured Symphony No 1 in recordings from René Jacobs and the B’Rock orchestra and from Klangkollektiv Wien under Rémy Ballot – wilful period-instrument iconoclasm coming up against reminiscences of an old Viennese tradition, albeit combined with chamber-orchestra agility. De Vriend’s Dutch band is larger but makes no concessions in terms of liveness and lightness of spirit in the early works; tempos are apposite, erring more towards the brisk and businesslike than to expansiveness. Brass (especially the all-important trumpets in No 1) are vividly caught and woodwind comment piquantly above the inviting glow of the string body.

The Eighth – its two movements lasting longer than the Third’s four – blows in as if from another planet. De Vriend revels in this substitution of Romantic unease for Classical formal certainty in a performance that bodes well for the Ninth that will surely follow. **David Thresher**

Symphony No 1 – selected comparisons:

Klangkollektiv Wien, Ballot (2/19) (GRAM) 99180

B’Rock Orch, Jacobs (2/19) (PENT) PTC5186 707

R Strauss

Also sprach Zarathustra, Op 30. Salome – Dance of the Seven Veils. Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche, Op 28. Tod und Verklärung, Op 24

Lucerne Festival Orchestra / Riccardo Chailly

Decca © 483 3080 (85’ • DDD)

Recorded live at KKL Luzern, August 11 & 12, 2017



Four years ago, Riccardo Chailly conducted a series of Strauss tone poems in his final London concerts with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra. He revealed himself then as an intelligent, clear-sighted and unsentimental interpreter of a composer who – as James Jolly reminds us the essay accompanying this release – has been far from central to his activity. Now, however, we get to a generous prospectus of Chailly the Straussian in this album recorded live in 2017 with one of the orchestras he took over on leaving Leipzig, the purring virtuoso machine that is the Lucerne Festival Orchestra. And the playing, predictably, is stunningly good, the performances superbly taut, concentrated and responsive.

Till Eulenspiegel perhaps comes off best of all: rarely has the work sounded so dazzlingly fresh and brilliant. The strings have a razor-like sharpness, the brass real bite. The winds, especially, are gleefully virtuoso and characterful across the board,



Dazzlingly fresh: Riccardo Chailly makes his first Strauss recording with the Lucerne Festival Orchestra

each player pulling at the leash as if desperate to skip off to star in their own tone poem (listen to the wonderful squawking D clarinet at 5'30"). The humour, meanwhile, comes off all the more vividly for Chailly's straight-man direction.

At the other end of the spectrum, the performance of *Tod und Verklärung* is also deeply satisfying. Chailly builds up the tension patiently, the climaxes hitting home powerfully without ever teetering over into mawkishness. Here, though, as in the opener, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, one notices that the orchestra's generally analytical sound (at least as captured by Decca's engineers) can occasionally make for a lack of warmth.

In *Also sprach* there are moments, too, when Chailly's approach – more head than heart – can feel a little detached, not aware as it might be of what's at stake (Vasily Petrenko's recent Oslo account, for example, conveys a greater sense of affection for the score). Nevertheless, the playing is once again a marvel – sample the quality of the solo strings in the gradual build-up of 'Von den Hinterweltlern' or the blithe brilliance of the 'Tanzlied'. The clarity and control of even the most crowded textures is astonishing.

The same goes for the album's brilliant finale, a Dance of the Seven Veils that's perhaps more coolly calculated than voluptuously seductive but makes a superb showcase for conductor and orchestra. All in all a luxurious treat, highly recommended. **Hugo Shirley**

Also sprach Zarathustra – selected comparison:
Oslo PO, V Petrenko (8/19) (LAWO) LWC1166

Vivaldi

The Four Seasons. Violin Concerto, RV222 – Ciaccona. Sonata, 'La follia', Op 1 No 12 RV63

Leila Schayegh *vn*

Musica Fiorita / Daniela Dolci *hpd*
Glossa © GCD924203 (54' • DDD)



If you are a fan of *The Four Seasons* – and its popularity certainly doesn't

stop it from being a masterpiece – you will probably have more than one recording. One will be reliably conventional while still (hopefully) conveying the music's elemental energy. Another might be more quirky in its summoning of the storms, dog days and festivals of the Italian countryside, good for when you want your imagination fired but

perhaps with peculiarities to stop you reaching for it every time.

Leila Schayegh's recording with Musica Fiorita under Daniela Dolci probably comes into the second category, its most prominent oddities being a brief, improvisatory violin solo to introduce each Season and the addition to the orchestra of a bird-warbler and a thunder sheet. For some these idiosyncrasies will already be too irritating to bear. But if you can listen past them, the performances begin to sound like exceptionally vivid descriptive realisations using the materials Vivaldi gave us. That Schayegh has a strong vision is proved by a charming booklet note which augments Vivaldi's explicatory sonnets with her own impressions of the seasons in her native Switzerland, providing a level of detail and specificity that finds its way into the music with enormous charm. It means you really feel the heart-lifting reanimation of Spring's showers and rivulets, the battering exchanges of heat and rain in Summer, the colour and excitement of Autumn, and the seductive comforts and discomforts of Winter.

In her recordings to date Schayegh has shown herself a violinist of real quality, so it is no surprise that she plays with silvery-smooth tone and sure-handed virtuosity, or

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that her ornamentation of the slow movements of Spring and Winter has shapely long lines. Yet I also feel that she has revealed more of her personality here, while at the same managing the trick of making the performance not be all about her. For that, the orchestra is right on her side, enthusiastic and alert to every nuance, although they may have liked a clearer acoustic, while to my ears two harpsichords, two pluckers and a psaltery is too much continuo for a single-string band. The result, though, is still a *Seasons* worth turning to more than once in a while.

Lindsay Kemp

'Belle époque'

Brahms Clarinet Sonata No 1, Op 120 No 1 (orch Berio) **Debussy** Première Rapsodie **Pierné** Canzonetta, Op 19 **Trojan** Rhapsodie **Widor** Introduction et Rondo, Op 72
Annelien Van Wauwe *cl*
Lille National Orchestra / Alexandre Bloch
Pentatone (F) PTC5186 808 (60' • DDD/DSD)



Think of La belle époque and I'm not sure Johannes Brahms necessarily springs to

mind. Nevertheless, his First Clarinet Sonata, dressed in dubious orchestral garb by Luciano Berio, forms a significant portion of Annelien Van Wauwe's debut disc for Pentatone, along with the premiere recording of Manfred Trojan's 2002 *Rhapsodie* for clarinet and orchestra. Although its three movements do bear French titles, the Parisian element of this recital is limited to Debussy, Pierné and Widor, aided by Van Wauwe's silky 'Vintage' Buffet Crampon instrument.

Debussy's *Prémère Rapsodie* emerges gradually from the mists, immediately establishing the Belgian clarinetist's warm, elegant tone and easy legato. Trills are evenly placed and the high notes are floated without becoming pinched. The Orchestre National de Lille prove sensitive partners, Alexandre Bloch bringing out the rich detail of Debussy's orchestration. The two other brief French numbers come in rather twee orchestrations by Jelle Tassyns – lots of pretty percussion and coy flutes – but are attractively presented.

Nigel Simeone's booklet note quotes Brahms's letter to his clarinetist muse Richard Mühlfeld: 'I have not been so impulsive as to write a clarinet concerto for you! But if everything goes well, there will be two modest sonatas with piano!!!!???' I'm not sure that gave licence for Luciano Berio to orchestrate that First Sonata, in

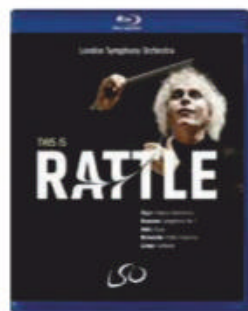
F minor, for a concerto it is not. The problem for any sonata orchestration is that a sonata is essentially an instrument in harmony with the piano, whereas a concerto sets the solo instrument in (virtuoso) opposition to the orchestra. Brahms rarely pits the clarinet in opposition to the piano so the orchestral result is rather glutinous, the clarinet wallowing in stodge. Berio prefaces the first two movements with short introductions, both beside the point. Van Wauwe plays the sonata/concerto well though, her chalumeau register suitably juicy, and she floats the *Andante un poco adagio* second movement nicely, with great sensitivity to her phrasing.

The most interesting item on the disc is undoubtedly the Trojan *Rhapsodie*. Just 18 minutes long, its three movements never outstay their welcome. The 'Rêverie' opens in suitably dreamy mode but soon turns nightmarish, with huge plunges from stratospheric top notes to the bottom. The second movement has a real *cantabile* character – do I detect traces of Tchaikovsky's 'None but the lonely heart' there? – while the 'Caprice' is a helter-skelter high-wire act for the soloist, which Van Wauwe navigates with aplomb.

Mark Pullinger

'This is Rattle'

Adès Asyla Birtwistle Violin Concerto^a
Elgar Variations on an Original Theme, 'Enigma', Op 36 **Grime** Woven Space – Fanfares **Knussen** Symphony No 3
^a**Christian Tetzlaff** *vn* **London Symphony Orchestra / Sir Simon Rattle**
LSO Live (F) (DVD + Blu-ray Disc) LSO3066 (115' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • 24-bit 48kHz & PCM stereo • O)
Recorded live at the Barbican Hall, London, September 14, 2017



In releasing films of significant recent concerts *in toto* on their own label, the LSO evidently have a

marketing plan in mind, but there is a danger that the details of the individual performances within them are obscured by a sense of occasion that, in itself, passes with time. Considered as if from first principles, Bruckner's Eighth Symphony (9/18) was one example; others no less remarkable on their own terms were the *Quatre Poèmes hindous* of Delage and *Métaboles* of Dutilleux (A/17).

In the same vein, from the opening concert of Simon Rattle's tenure as music director, the Violin Concerto by Harrison

Birtwistle deserves a CD release to itself. At its UK premiere in 2011, the single-movement piece had made a strong if unfocused impression as an unlikely but happy marriage of composer and form. Birtwistle has not forsaken his lingua franca of slowly shifting masses of pedal-point harmony, or large ensembles anchored by deep currents of low brass, but he has mediated their elemental power with a procession of orchestral soloists who, one by one, join the soloist in duet. Camera angles in the Barbican are limited compared with the imagination and virtuosity of the playing here: another argument for the CD format.

Christian Tetzlaff gave the first performances, and he continues to own the concerto, as it were, with playing of ferocious accuracy throughout an almost unbroken sequence of urgent, keening recitatives exploiting the instrument's full range. Resolution is hard to come by in Birtwistle; the concerto's business is with an unending dialogue between the one and the many, shared with his operas. The part may often sing of ambition frustrated or loneliness unconsolated, but it sings nevertheless. Without tying up the argument in a neat bow, Tetzlaff impresses the sense of an ending on the closing pages as the soloist is absorbed, Berg-like, within the onward passage of orchestral time.

This putative CD would also valuably include *Woven Space*, a commission from Helen Grime for Rattle's first season. Designed to stand alone, the four-minute opening 'Fanfares' nevertheless leaves a fleeting impression of aerobic activity contrasted with a melody passed between solo winds: a tantalising proposition answered here not by its companions but by its obvious forebears, late 20th-century veiled symphonies by Adès and Knussen.

When Rattle premiered *Asyla* in 1998 and then raised the curtain in Berlin with it four years later, the relative unfamiliarity of its idiom generated a freshness in both performance and filming that this third recording lacks, for all its polish. Knussen's Third is another matter: full of luminous detail, its sometimes violent, always intricate progress unfolding across the whole orchestra and heading towards a huge, 12-note chord with Brahmsian inevitability. Much the same could be said of the *Enigma* Variations, caressed into form with a knowing, 2019 version of the portamento used by the Queen's Hall Orchestra on the work's first recording. The 'EDU' finale receives an electric account and reception, and the film surely records a sign of things to come.

Peter Quantrill

Berlioz's *La damnation de Faust*

Conductor **John Nelson** and tenor **Michael Spyres** tell Neil Fisher about recording the work



Taken to the limits by the music: a superb Berlioz team – Michael Spyres, Joyce DiDonato and conductor John Nelson

We have gone to hell and back and everyone is exhausted. The veteran conductor John Nelson is backstage at the Palais des Congrès in Strasbourg the morning after the second of two poleaxing performances of Berlioz's *La damnation de Faust*. With him is his star tenor, Michael Spyres. The concerts which will be turned into a recording follow the success of Nelson's multiple award-winning *Les Troyens* and reunite Nelson and the Strasbourg Philharmonic Orchestra with both Spyres and Joyce DiDonato, who sing Faust and Marguerite.

It is hard to think of two artists more associated with the music of this composer than are Nelson and Spyres. Spyres is the top of casting agents' wish lists for his Berlioz heroes – Aeneas in *Les Troyens*, and especially Faust. He is certain that he has sung Faust more than any other tenor alive. 'I know it like the back of my hand. My dream is to conduct it. And to put Faust to rest and do Mephisto.' He isn't joking: he started as a baritone and still describes himself as a 'baritenor'. And, as he'll reveal, this kind of mixing of voice types is exactly what Berlioz was looking for.

Nelson's experience with Berlioz takes him back many decades, and he has clocked up eight different runs of *La damnation de Faust* across the world. So I ask the conductor which type of performance fits Berlioz's *légende dramatique* better: the operatic production or the concert staging – as he is a veteran of both. 'It's not an opera, and I prefer it in a concert

version,' he argues. 'There are so many stage instructions in the score, so I think he wanted the singers to express it as if they were on stage, but he didn't conceive it as an opera.' Spyres agrees, noting that Berlioz's detailed instructions allow the listener 'to discover the whole world within'.

Using a concert hall doesn't cramp the work's theatricality, either. In Strasbourg, Nelson says he asked the singers 'to be very free within their space – even the chorus'. He wanted them swaying around drunkenly during the scene in Auerbach's Keller – Faust's first taste of real, hedonistic life. 'I've encouraged them to really go for broke in that,' Nelson laughs. 'And they *almost* do. Because it's difficult to let go.'

It is the extremities of Berlioz's vision, the uncompromising ambition, that we keep circling back to. The poor reception that Berlioz got after the premiere of the work is bound up with the demands it makes on its interpreters. Aeneas in *Les Troyens* is considered a real monster of the tenor repertoire, but Spyres says Faust is harder. 'You're on stage nearly the entire time, and of the two hours and twenty minutes, you're singing for about an hour and a half.'

As for the instrumentalists: 'They couldn't achieve what Berlioz asks for, which is extreme technical brilliance,' says Nelson, who picks out the 'Menuet des follets', in which Mephistopheles summons infernal spirits to flicker and dance around Marguerite's house. 'The coda there is written at an unbelievable pace; 152, I think, is the metronome marking.'

We do about 148, so we get close to it, but there are recordings, Georges Prêtre's for one, that get it to go up to 160.'


I ask Nelson how, or even if, it is possible to apply thematic unity to the disparate score, with its mixture of oratorio-like set pieces, orchestral interludes and close-focus narrative. 'Well, I try to connect it, but you go from one extreme to another! Yet the piece is so well constructed, so "condensed", compared with *Les Troyens*, that it holds together.'

Spyres says it isn't just the duration of his part that's so daunting, it's the breadth of styles that Berlioz requires. The composer was, the tenor thinks, in a sort of a feeding frenzy in Paris at the time, sampling three different kinds of singing at the city's opera houses. These incorporated the 'old' Italian style inherited from the Baroque; an emerging technique from France with much music in a higher tessitura; and what Spyres calls the 'crazy breakthrough' style most famously shown off by Gilbert Duprez, the first tenor to sing a high C in chest voice. 'Berlioz had all this at his disposal – he could hear all these singers trying out new techniques.'

'When John conducts the finale you feel this uplifting love – without melancholy. And it makes so much sense' – Michael Spyres

For Spyres, instructions in the score such as *sotto voce* or *più piano* make up 'an entire roadmap'. Understood correctly, they tell him whether to use the falsetto-ish *voix mixte*, or a dark baritone sound, or a heroic, muscular high tenor. We chew over two examples in *La damnation*. One is Faust's honeyed reverie in Marguerite's room, music requiring a 'heady *voix mixte*' and underscored at one point by the composer with a triple *pianissimo* marking. The other is 'Nature immense', the wild aria that follows Faust's seduction and abandonment of Marguerite. 'You have to make yourself heard against this immense sound in the orchestra – the waves crashing, the forests crying, the giant mountains. "Crumble, you rocks!" sings Faust. It envelopes you. Yeah, your voice might crack a few times. If you do it the way Berlioz wrote, it pushes you to your limits.'

And here we are again – talking about Berlioz ripping up the rule book, always wanting extra. The Strasbourg forces supply a particularly vehement Ride to the Abyss, an *accelerando* to end all *accelerandos* – 'because it already starts at a brilliant tempo', says Nelson. 'What's written there is 144, and we do that, but then Berlioz presses it even further and you have to go up to breakneck speed. That's maybe the most difficult orchestral part of the piece.' But for Spyres, it was Nelson's swiftness in the finale, when Marguerite's soul ascends to heaven, that touched him most. 'It's the first time I've heard it without melancholy. When John conducts it everyone feels this uplifting love. And it makes so much sense.'

Both Nelson and Spyres are Christians and in this piece their belief inspires them. They both believe that the Devil – which they see as humankind's propensity for evil acts – is all too real, that we all have choices about whether to be good or bad. The redemptive climax of *La damnation de Faust*, the children's chorus giving celestial balm, marks the victory of goodness. 'This man was an unbeliever,' says Nelson of Berlioz. 'Yet he manages to capture faith. He does it at the end of the Requiem, and he does it at the end of this piece.'  Nelson's *Faust* recording is released on Warner Classics, November 22

PHOTOGRAPHY: GREGORY MASSAT



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Chamber



Michelle Assay explores Dohnányi with the Takács Quartet:

'They allow every passionate detail to come across yet preserve a sense of nobility and innate grace' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 56**



Rob Cowan welcomes a debut disc from violinist Tessa Lark:

'Lark, ably aided by pianist Amy Yang, achieves a performance that combines warmth and virtuosity' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 61**

JS Bach • Beethoven • Schnittke

'Prism II'

JS Bach Fugue, BWV869 (arr EA Förster)

Beethoven String Quartet No 13, Op 130

(with Grosse Fuge, Op 133)

Schnittke String Quartet No 3

Danish Quartet

ECM New Series © 481 8564 (77' • DDD)



Polystylism was until quite recently a backhanded compliment thrown

at Schnittke, and yet the presence of the Third Quartet is hardly required to issue a reminder that Beethoven – like Stravinsky, for that matter like Bach – listened deeply through what counted for music history in his own era, took what spoke to him and made it his own. Nevertheless, the coupling works, as the Britten Quartet established when they made their debut album (Collins Classics, 4/90); and following on from the Danish String Quartet's well-received first 'Prism' volume (12/18) of Op 127 with Shostakovich's last quartet, Schnittke's annexation of DSCH to the opening notes of the *Grosse Fuge* to form a hybrid leitmotif acquires an even more compelling logic in this new, immaculately engineered album.

Versatility is a signal virtue of the ensemble: their smoothly planed, viol-like pure tone in the opening Bach fugue (to close Book 1 of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, the one with all 12 notes) as well as the Lassus cadence which opens the Schnittke (this album is full of doors closing on to new and initially disorienting rooms) carries no trace of irony or displacement. It's natural music-making, and no less winning in their ways are the quartet's blithe assimilation of 18th-century minuet style in the *Poco scherzando* of the Beethoven, or the bleak electrical buzzing in the finale of the Schnittke.

Without underplaying the changes of tack which make the opening movement

of Op 130 Beethoven's most puzzling quartet movement, the DSQ find elegance and continuity here, too: the omission of the repeat paradoxically carries the listener through its eddies of thought as if on a canoe journey so eventful that there's no time to consider imminent peril. Even a deeply considered account of the Cavatina – more soulful pure tone here – does not interrupt the momentum towards an account of the *Grosse Fuge* that's as beautiful as it has any right to be, no less unsettling in that regard than much tougher and self-consciously 'modern' accounts. **Peter Quantrill**

Beach • Clarke • Farrenc

'Her Voice'

Beach Piano Trio, Op 150 **Clarke** Piano Trio

Farrenc Piano Trio No 1, Op 33

Neave Trio

Chandos © CHAN20139 (72' • DDD)



There are some half-dozen accounts of Amy Beach's 1938 Trio (in A minor, not specified on the disc) currently available that I know of. One – from the Ambache – is also on Chandos and has long been my go-to recommendation for this lively yet nostalgic work, based largely on material from some of Beach's songs. As Rob Cowan noted in his review of the fine Monte Trio version a couple of years ago, the Ambache brought greater breadth to the central *Lento espressivo* than their rivals, and so it proves again here, though the Neave are persuasive advocates of the work's 'late-Romantic glow'. Their articulation of the swifter passages does them credit and this is a strong alternative.

The Trio (1921) by Rebecca Clarke (this year marks the 40th anniversary of her death) is even better served on disc at present, with several fine recordings. I have long admired that by Martin Roscoe, Andrew Watkinson and David Waterman

on ASV (coupled with Beach's Quintet, curiously), though this newcomer runs it close and is rather more sumptuously recorded. Like the Trio des Alpes (who coupled their account with a so-so one of the Beach), the Neave have the measure of Clarke's then quite radical style, closer to Bartók than to Vaughan Williams. The greater cogency of Clarke's writing draws out a taut and vivid interpretation.

Louise Farrenc composed three piano trios (the third is an alternative version of the Op 44 Flute Trio) and they are all terrific listens. The Neave take a comparatively expansive way with No 1 here, as compared to the Linos Ensemble, part of a fine all-Farrenc programme with slightly more clinical sound. Collectors may prefer all-Beach or all-Farrenc couplings but the Neave's programme makes a splendid introduction to these three pioneering female composers.

Guy Rickards

Beach – selected comparisons:

Ambache (12/99) (CHAN) CHAN9752

Monte Trio (8/17) (GENU) GEN17449

Clarke – selected comparison:

Roscoe, Atkinson, Waterman (ASV) CDDCA932

Beach, Clarke – selected comparison:

Trio des Alpes (8/15) (DYNA) CDS7717

Farrenc – selected comparison:

Linos Ens (CPO) CPO777 256-2

Beethoven

'Beethoven Around the World: Vienna'

String Quartets - No 7, Op 59 No 1;

No 8, Op 59 No 2

Ébène Quartet

Erato © 9029 53960-2 (78' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Mozartsaal, Konzerthaus, Vienna, June 10 & 11, 2019



A well-spaced recording from the chamber music hall of the Vienna

Konzerthaus places the Ébène players in the traditional layout, with an abundance of telling dialogue between the channels,



Deeply sympathetic: the Arod Quartet excel in a superb programme of Schoenberg, Webern and Zemlinsky

violins answered by lower voices. They launch the first *Razumovsky* in high spirits, as if setting out on a summer hike, and the steady pulse of the Scherzo breathes a rustic air, driven by a symphonic momentum much more extrovert in character than the Belcea's quizzical phrasing and *sotto voce* contrasts (Zig-Zag, 8/13). Only with its final bars is the ground prepared for the broad pathos of the *Adagio mesto*.

This acute sense of emotional timing distinguishes the Ébènes from many of their contemporary rivals. They present Beethoven unburdened by the weight of history or hindsight, leaving the quartets to unfold at the pace of their own narratives. They may not approach the tragic rapture of the Végh Quartet (Naïve) in that *Adagio mesto*, or the overwhelming catharsis of the Busch (EMI/Warner) in the finale, but the lived intensity of Op 59 No 2's opening gambit resists superfluous historical comparison. The point is pressed home in the following *Allegro* and then reprised as a bolt from the blue that kicks down the door of the development section.

In each succeeding movement the Ébènes take a little more time than the

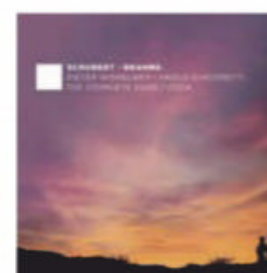
recent Cuarteto Casals (Harmonia Mundi, 5/19), and they use it to their advantage. The opening note of the *Adagio* – really *molto* here – is held just long enough to cut us adrift from tonal certainties, and orchestral parallels spring to mind once more in the forlorn tread of the dotted second theme (1'22"), which reverses the direction of the 'The-rese' idea in the Fourth Symphony – Op 60, you won't need reminding. While the rest of the Ébène cycle will be recorded elsewhere, it seems right to begin in Vienna, and Raphaël Merlin's cello plants the sound of the Scherzo in a Biedermeier world not entirely divested of charm by its unsettling syncopation. There is a sense of tradition revived and renewed about these readings that should appeal to all but the most iconoclastic listener. **Peter Quantrill**

Brahms • Schubert

'The Complete Duos - Coda'

Brahms Violin (Cello) Sonatas – No 1, Op 78; No 3, Op 108; 'FAE' Sonata – Scherzo, WoO2
Schubert Arpeggione Sonata, D821. Sonatina No 1, D384

Pieter Wispelwey vc **Paolo Giacometti** pf
Evil Penguin Ⓢ (two discs for the price of one)
EPRC0030 (91' • DDD)



Pieter Wispelwey's multi-album mission to record all of Brahms's and

Schubert's duos – not just the ones for cello – has struck a special chord with me over the course of its creation. Partly because it's very clearly been a labour of love, and partly because it's thrown up a few really interesting interpretations: for instance, hearing what the cello can do with Schubert's *Introduction and Variations on 'Trockne Blumen'* for flute (2/16). So now here is the fifth and final instalment, which as ever is further strengthened by hugely enjoyable and committed partnering from pianist Paolo Giacometti, and I'd say it's probably my favourite.

Top of my personal pops is Wispelwey's opener, Brahms's Violin Sonata in G major: a work which, unlike the Op 108 Violin Sonata also on this disc, has existed in a cello incarnation ever since it was transcribed by Paul Klengel during the last year of Brahms's life. However, while Klengel transposed it into D, Wispelwey sets it back into G for the first time, and

the results leave you wondering why no one thought of doing this before, because it feels so right. Take the cello's first-movement entry: whereas Klengel's transposition places the opening theme on the cello's highest string, and thus introduces a shine not there in the violin version (which begins on its softer second string), Wispelwey's G major repatriation has reintroduced all the original's soft, autumnal intimacy, further offset by the cello's own more dulcet tones. It's a winner, and I hope other cellists begin to follow suit.

Schubert's Violin Sonatina No 1 is an equal hit: understandably less gossamer-light than in its violin original but with Wispelwey bringing enough slender fragility and nimbleness to his radiant tones to make it more than work. Then the old cellist's chestnut, the Arpeggione Sonata, which sounds both like the fruits of decades of thoughtful exploration and as fresh as new paint.

I don't really like to add any niggles to all the above. However, I will just whisper that my one occasional reservation across the entire series has been the closeness of the recorded sound, and it's a similar story again here. On the plus side, this has delivered a vividness and immediacy that bring their own pleasures: take the excitingly meaty thwack of bow against strings on the *FAE* Sonata's *fortissimo* chord (bar 238). I'm less a fan of the very audible breathing; every so often it detracts slightly from the impression of elegance you feel from Wispelwey live. Still, read that more as 'be aware' than 'be warned', because ultimately this series deserves a hefty 'bravo'. **Charlotte Gardner**

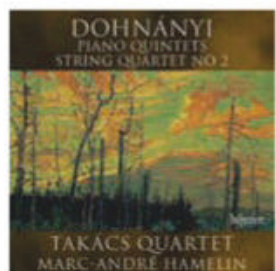
Dohnányi

Piano Quintets^a – No 1, Op 1; No 2, Op 26.

String Quartet No 2, Op 15

^aMarc-André Hamelin *pf* Takács Quartet

Hyperion © CDA68238 (81' • DDD)



In another life Marc-André Hamelin might have made a great political agitator, or even an evangelist. He has an unbeatable ability to convey and inspire belief in the value of the music he is performing, especially when that music is in need of special advocacy. His Medtner certainly made me, initially a sceptic, give the composer another chance, and now with the considerable help of the Takács Quartet he is evidently looking for converts to the cause of Dohnányi's piano quintets.

Even the most fiery preachers cannot make the First Quintet sound much more than it is: a solid academic work of a fine, talented 17-year-old student. Early critics put their finger on the influence of Schumann and Brahms here, and it is no surprise that the piece received Brahms's seal of approval. There are already some fine accounts out there, including one from the Takács in an earlier incarnation – only the cellist remains in the ensemble today – alongside András Schiff on Decca. That version, however, suffers from poor microphone placing and murky sound. This new one is finely recorded, and I particularly enjoyed Hamelin and the Takács's playful portrayal of the 5/4 finale, which could easily sound banal.

Hardly experimental but far more individual is the Second Quintet, composed almost two decades later. From the haunting opening bars to the otherworldly ending, with all Dohnányi's typical cyclic traits along the way, this certainly makes a case for canonic status. Hamelin and the Takács bring a remarkable breadth of conception to bear, not just within each movement but across the entire work. They allow every passionate detail to come across yet preserve a sense of nobility and innate grace that I always associate with Dohnányi. By comparison the Schubert Ensemble on Hyperion are sleek enough but short of unstoppable energy. Gottlieb Wallisch and the Ensō Quartet on Naxos are a great budget choice, but again are no match for the overall urgency of Hamelin/Takács or, in particular, for the lilt they bring to the second movement. More comparable in quality are Roscoe and the Vanbrugh Quartet, who are also a fraction tighter in their tempos in all movements; but I do prefer the balance of the new recording and the magical warmth of Hamelin's piano sound.

Interspersing the two quintets with Dohnányi's Second String Quartet rather serves to reveal how much he depended on the piano to fire his imagination. For all the Takács's sensitivity and full-blooded enthusiasm, it's hard not to recall that Bartók's First Quartet was just three years away and in a different league in terms of imaginative harmony, texture and structure. Still, this is an eminently collectable disc, certainly, but not only, for existing Dohnányi aficionados.

Michelle Assay

Quintet No 1 – selected comparison:

Schiff, Takács Qt (12/88) (DECC) ➔ 421 423-2DH

Quintet No 2 – selected comparisons:

Roscoe, Vanbrugh Qt (5/95) (ASV) ➔ CDDCA915

Wallisch, Ensō Qt (2/15) (NAXO) 8 570572

Handel

'Complete Solo Sonatas'

Il Rossignolo

Deutsche Harmonia Mundi © ④ 19075 94366-2

(4h 1' • DDD)



Perhaps surprisingly, this chunky four-CD set from Il Rossignolo stands as the very first complete recording of all Handel's surviving sonatas for solo instrument and continuo. That's 19 in all, spread across printed editions, autograph manuscripts and other manuscript sources, but to me what really makes this chronologically arranged major recording project stand out is the fact that Il Rossignolo have also incorporated all the duplicate movements and different forms by which each sonata has survived to the present day; and because these are also programmed alongside each other, it's possible to instantly compare the differences worked by a key or instrumental change. Take the Oboe Sonata in F, HWV363*a*, followed by its transposition by an unknown hand into the Flute Sonata in G, HWV363*b*. Or the seven-movement Recorder Sonata in D minor, HWV367*a* (the longest and most elaborate of Handel's sonatas), followed by its re-penning to become HWV367*b* in B minor for flute.

Other points of interest include hearing HWV358 set down not as a violin sonata but as a recorder one, the view having been taken that when its range makes no use of the violin's lower strings, it's more likely to have been originally intended for the 'flauto italiano', whose lowest note is the G above middle C. Marcia Testi plays it with verve, vigour and virtuosity, although some readers may feel that her attractively open tone occasionally tips slightly towards sounding overblown. Thinking along the same lines but a few tracks on, violinist Florian Deuter's swells are strongly pronounced in the Violin Sonata in A, Op 1 No 3 (HWV361), although in other ways his nimble, dulcet-toned reading is a very refined one with its carefully measured vibrato and ornamentation.

Further strings pleasure comes via hearing Paolo Biordi's viola da gamba interpretation of HWV364 off the back of Deuter's violin version, while oboist Martino Noferi and flautist Marica Testi complete the woodwind complement, with airy softness from Testi and light-touched courtliness from Noferi. Harpsichordist Ottaviano Tenerani's colourful and

responsive partnering is unfailingly enjoyable throughout.

One further bonus is the table at the back of the booklet listing all the sonatas with their probable dates of composition and source details. So while there may be other recordings I'd go to first for some of the sonatas here, it's an enjoyable listen, with much to recommend it from a scholarly perspective. **Charlotte Gardner**

Kodály

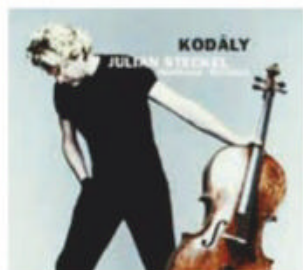
Solo Cello Sonata, Op 8.

Sonatina, Op 4^a. Duo, Op 7^b

Julian Steckel *vc*

^b**Antje Weithaas** *vn* ^a**Paul Rivinius** *vc*

AVI-Music © AVI8553272 (65' • DDD)



Julian Steckel digs into the first chord of Kodály's Solo Sonata (1914) with a gruff flourish, and from there his fierce concentration doesn't waver for a single bar. But, then, this sprawling and technically fiendish work seems to inspire the best from cellists of all stripes, and there are more than a few superb recordings in the catalogue – including four by János Starker, who (at the age of 15) played it for Kodály,

winning the composer's enthusiastic approval. Steckel studied the Sonata with Starker, who advised him: 'always remain clear in your expression', and that 'precise rhythm is of utter importance'. I'd say Steckel has taken this guidance to heart, and I'll go a step further and maintain that his performance here surpasses his mentor's in its balance of vigour and refinement. Indeed, he communicates with an oratorical fervour that makes this sprawling score feel almost compact.

Even in the expansive *Adagio*, Steckel binds the variegated phrases together so they sound not only indissoluble but lead inexorably from one to the next, holding fast to the music's twisting and sometimes shredded melodic thread. I'm particularly impressed by the way he handles the passages that are simultaneously bowed and plucked, suggesting a singer accompanying himself with a zither or tamburica, perhaps – listen starting at 3'13", and then also at 9'13", where his tone becomes choked with emotion. In the wild finale, Steckel dances more nimbly than Starker – and more rhythmically precise – even if he isn't quite as earthy.

The Duo (1915) is cut from similar cloth and violinist Antje Weithaas's wiry sound suits it well. She doesn't uncover quite as

much expressive detail as Josef Gingold in his riveting performance with Starker (Delos, 1/89), but there's no lack of passion or dramatic concision – turn, for example, to the end of the slow movement (starting at 7'30") where enraptured delicacy unexpectedly turns to tragedy. The more dreamily Debussian Sonatina (1922) is marvellously fluid, vividly flecked with colour and smartly placed as the programme opener.

My disc has a reprise of the first few bars of the Sonata's finale tacked on after a pause at the end of the Duo, a minor glitch on an otherwise splendid – and splendidly recorded – release. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Mozart

Divertimento, K254. Piano Trios – No 1, K496; No 3, K502; No 4, K542; No 5, K548; No 6, K564

Michael Barenboim *vn* **Kian Soltani** *vc*

Daniel Barenboim *pf*

DG ® ② 483 7506GH2 (149' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Pierre Boulez Saal, Berlin, February 18-20, 2019



Naturally, the big personality here is Barenboim. Not Daniel but Michael

Bach Violin Concertos Kati Debretzeni Gardiner

J S Bach

Violin Concerto in A Minor, BWV 1041

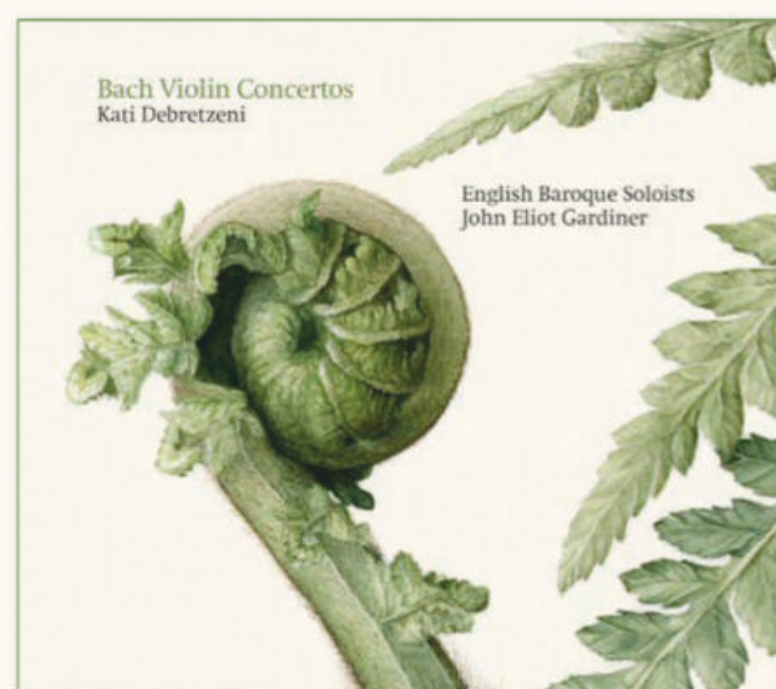
Violin Concerto in D Major, BWV 1053

Arr: Kati Debretzeni **world-premiere recording**

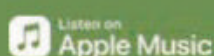
Violin Concerto in E Major, BWV 1042

Violin Concerto in D Minor, BWV 1052

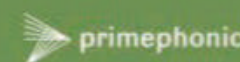
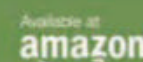
Arr: Wilfried Fischer / Kati Debretzeni



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Barenboim, his violinist son, himself an estimable soloist in concert and on disc, and leader of his father's West-Eastern Divan Orchestra. It may be a result of the vagaries of recording this combination of piano and strings – notoriously difficult to balance ideally – but it is the violin, not the piano, that is consistently, insistently the sound that dominates these performances.

That's not to say that Barenboim *père* sinks into the background. He's a pianist who never passes up an opportunity to play to the back of the hall; and while he is a model of chamber-music give-and-take once the music gets under way, hear the way he opens, say, the G major Trio (K496) as if it were a solo piano sonata. Compare that with the more self-effacing musicianship of (to pick just two examples close at hand) Susan Tomes for the Florestan Trio or Maria João Pires with Augustin Dumay and Jian Wang – both recordings in which, in startlingly different ways, parity between the three instruments is achieved and held within a continuous equilibrium with a naturalness that is absent here.

Then there is the tone of Barenboim *fil's* violin: perhaps again it is the placing of the microphones but it rarely falls gratefully on the ear. Passing over such moments as the vulgar swoop at the violin entry in the slow movement of the B flat Trio (K502), there is an unvarying abrasiveness to his sound that becomes increasingly wearing – an edge that was not an issue on these players' Mozart piano quartets from the same venue (A/18) – especially at a moment such as the chugging accompaniment figure at the outset of K496's closing variations, or passages above the stave in the *Allegro* of the C major Trio (K548). Poor Kian Soltani, struggling to be noticed alongside these two larger-than-life musical characters. He honestly doesn't put a foot (or a finger) wrong.

These recordings are taken live from the Pierre Boulez Saal in central Berlin. Some ornaments sound as if they didn't fall easily under the fingers in performance and there is in quite a lot of the music a sound like fingernails on keys, which especially makes listening on headphones less pleasurable still. The Florestan Trio remain a prime digital recommendation in the five piano trios (No 2 is K498, the *Kegelstatt*, for clarinet, viola and piano) and the early Divertimento; Pires et al only recorded three of the six works, more's the pity.

David Threasher

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

Florestan Trio (8/06, 6/07) (HYPE)

CDA67556, CDA67609 (oas)

Divertimento, Piano Trios Nos 1 & 3 – selected comparison:

Pires, Dumay, Wang (10/97) (DG) 449 208-2GH

Mozart · Schubert

Mozart String Quartet No 15, K421

Schubert String Quartet No 15, D887

Voce Quartet

Alpha Ⓢ ALPHA559 (67' • DDD)



These two works are, as per the cover legend, 'Quartets Nos 15' but apart from

this they are perhaps an odd couple. On grounds of key alone, K421's predecessor, K387, would at least have matched D887's G major; or Schubert's previous quartet, *Death and the Maiden*, would have mirrored Mozart's D minor.

The Quatuor Voce offer a notably Gallic interpretation, favouring sweetness and richness of tone over the more Germanic virtues of attack and forward propulsion. Sonic consistency is never compromised, meaning that the Mozart's first *forte* or the convulsions of the Schubert's slow movement maintain a sense of propriety, whereas an ensemble from further east might be tempted to dig in, sacrificing purity for starker effect. The Voce, however, clearly enjoy the range of sounds both works require, the Schubert's opening movement especially demonstrating a range from gossamer tremolandos in the opening movement to the fullest possible sonority.

Listeners will feel short-changed by the stingy provision of repeats – with 13 or so minutes unused on the disc, more might have been provided. Nevertheless, both performances are otherwise finely wrought and may be recommended for those who seek a recording that prizes sensation over demonstrativeness.

David Threasher

Poulenc · Seabourne · Vladigerov

Poulenc Violin Sonata

Seabourne A Portrait and Four Nocturnes

Vladigerov Violin Sonata, Op 1

Irina Borissova *vn* **Giacomo Battarino** *pf*

Sheva Collection Ⓢ SH226 (74' • DDD)



Poulenc wasn't instinctively drawn to the violin sonata: 'The prima donna violin over arpeggiated piano nauseates me', he's reported to have said. Hard to guess, then, what he'd make of this curiously programmed recital, which places his solitary Violin Sonata between

the Bulgarian Pancho Vladigerov – a Romantic with a capital R – and Peter Seabourne's homage to Chopin, who pretty much patented that whole lyrical-sentimental idiom.

But it actually makes a strangely satisfying sequence, and one that shows the particular qualities of these performers to good advantage. Some adjustment will be needed at first: the acoustic is close and boxy, and the piano – apparently a Steinway Model B – initially sounds synthetic and hard-edged, a bit like a clavichord. Nor does the recording flatter the upper register of Borissova's violin (though she plays with fine body and bite on the lower strings). Once the ear has adjusted it's easier to appreciate the pair's rapport and sense of drama; perfect for the sweeping vistas of Vladigerov's 1914 Sonata, a work that could easily have emerged from Vienna or Berlin that same year.

But that brittle, upfront sound is actually an asset in the Poulenc, which the pair approach in restless, sometimes savage strokes of colour – Borissova's plangent double-stopping in the second movement's homage to Lorca is sultry without being sentimental. And it's highly effective, too, in Seabourne's *A Portrait and Four Nocturnes*: not, Seabourne insists, a sort of 'Chopiniana' but an expressionistic meditation on romanticism itself, etched in silvery harmonics and midnight-black clouds of piano tone, and realised with hallucinatory clarity by Borissova and Battarino. The composer (who co-produced the disc) must feel gratified at a performance of such character and conviction. **Richard Bratby**

Schoenberg · Webern · Zemlinsky

'The Mathilde Album'

Schoenberg String Quartet No 2, Op 10^a

Webern Langsamer Satz

Zemlinsky String Quartet No 2, Op 15

Arod Quartet with ^a**Elsa Dreisig** *sop*

Erato Ⓢ 9029 54255-2 (80' • DDD)



Come for the sex, stay for the music. That would seem to be the implication

behind the title of the Arod Quartet's album, referring as it does to Mathilde Schoenberg's affair with the painter Robert Gerstl. It's salutary to remember Mahler's dedication of the Eighth Symphony to Alma, in the middle of her affair with Walter Gropius. Having won Mathilde back, Schoenberg did the same with the

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20th-century African-American composer Margaret Bonds receives long overdue recognition with the world-premiere recording of her crowning achievement, *The Ballad of the Brown King*. With a libretto by Langston Hughes, this Christmas cantata which focuses on the dark-skinned Balthazar of the three kings, is beautifully interpreted by New York City-based The Dessoff Choirs and Orchestra. This unique seasonal album also includes a selection of specially arranged songs, including a setting of Hughes' seminal poem *I, Too, Sing America*, performed by baritone Merriweather and Bonds authority Ashley Jackson on solo harp.



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AV 2402

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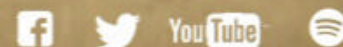
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Second Quartet – on a fraction of the symphony's scale but of inversely greater significance for posterity.

The devoted Webern put in a word for his teacher, and the album opens with a flexible and delicately shaded account of the *Langsamer Satz* which Schoenberg had set him as an exercise in 1905. The quartet employ a wider range of vibrato than on their fine debut album of Mendelssohn (11/17), including much expressively rich pure tone, yet the octaves and unisons are still breathtakingly clean, like mountain air, the soft playing (as at the main theme's reprise, 5'55") exquisite, the evocation of place and space – in this case a flower meadow, walking with the cousin Webern would come to marry – deeply sympathetic.

There follows what would usually count as the main event on such an album, the Schoenberg, full of subtle rhythmic humour in the ironically folk-tinged Scherzo and more judiciously placed pure tone to contrast with the refined warmth of the 'Litanei', where close-miked detail and restrained phrasing hint at an unconsummated relationship with *Verklärte Nacht*. Set a little further back in the mix, Elsa Dreisig moves distractingly between channels but sings the George poem with exemplary diction and a chaste firmness of tone that leads well into the 'other world' of the finale.

I said usually. On this occasion the limelight is stolen from Schoenberg by Zemlinsky, who did not so much teach him as set him on his path to genius, and by a simply irresistible performance of his own, satisfyingly complex Second Quartet. Here the roles are reversed, and the Arod's single-minded clarity of purpose allows us to hear Zemlinsky coming to his own terms with the harmonic discoveries of his reluctant and recalcitrant revolutionary. This music requires little excuse to become overheated, and it is much to the Arod's credit that they resist the temptation to press the bow into the string until really decisive moments such as the orchestrally scaled climax to the first section (3'30") or the frenzied close to the scherzo section, which introduces an unmistakable quotation from *Verklärte Nacht* in a gesture of fulfilment typical of the proud but generous Zemlinsky. The coupling is as unique as it is insightful, and comparisons would seem beside the point: it's an outstanding album. **Peter Quantrill**

Shostakovich

String Quartets – No 2, Op 68;

No 7, Op 108; No 8, Op 110

Pavel Haas Quartet

Supraphon © SU4271-2 (71' • DDD)



Shostakovich's Second Quartet is remarkable for its sheer insistence. Long stretches of

the first movement are sustained at a constant *forte* or *fortissimo*, the first violin's recitatives in the second movement push way past the expressive pain threshold, and to call the finale's accumulating variations inexorable would be an understatement. The Pavel Haas register all this to the *n*th degree, and I would have been inclined to hail this one of the finest of all recorded accounts had they only brought more coiled tenseness to the shadowy outer sections of the Waltz third movement.

The recording quality is correspondingly striking in its combined focus and spaciousness, but in a way that serves to highlight what is missing in the playing as much as what is there. In the Seventh Quartet the last movement is certainly terrific in its urgency and savage attack. But I don't think anyone listening to the opening movement without a score would guess that its notated dynamics hardly ever rise above *mezzo-piano* – the Pavel Haas rarely even fall to that level. And the central *Lento* is somehow too much at ease with itself for a movement so bleak and lonely in its texturing (almost literally so, since the scoring is reduced for the most part to two or three lines).

There is more subtlety in their Eighth Quartet, and perhaps if I had tried this first I would have been more sympathetically attuned to their tremendous clarity and wide expressive range. Hearing it after the Seventh, however, I was more inclined to find some of their expressive turns once again a little too blatant and some of their fast playing too keen to over-sell the violence, almost as if back-transcribing from the string orchestra transcription. Do we really need so much inadvertent *col legno* rasp in the second movement, for instance? I do like their decisions on articulation here and in the *danse macabre* third movement, though equally I wish these could have been projected within more consistent tempos. There is some lovely playing in the three slow movements. But, overall, a near miss, I feel. **David Fanning**

'Cobbett's Legacy'

'The New Cobbett Prize for Chamber Music'

G Benjamin Fantasia **7 Hurlstone** Phantasia Quartet **Knussen** ... upon one note **SW Lewis** Sequenza **B Martin** Lazarus **C Matthews** Fantazia **13 Osborn** Living Floors

Berkeley Ensemble

Resonus © RES10243 (51' • DDD)



What a good idea! Looking for practical ways to spread the word about emerging

composers, the Berkeley Ensemble revisited the composition competitions organised in Britain in the early 20th century by the philanthropist Walter Willson Cobbett. Cobbett specified single-movement, multi-section chamber works inspired by the 17th-century Phantasy, and assiduously promoted the works that resulted. The Berkeley Ensemble's 'New Cobbett Prize' appears to set the same parameters, with inclusion on this disc as part of the reward.

Cobbett was an open-minded soul, and he would surely have been delighted at the range of styles and the depth of imagination in the three winning pieces included here. The spirit of Messiaen hovers over Barnaby Martin's *Lazarus*, in which, in parallel with the biblical story, a pregnant, ominous beginning opens out into music of quiet rapture, with cello and clarinet taking the roles of Christ and Lazarus respectively. Laurence Osborn's *Living Floors* follows a similar trajectory, from dark, primal grindings and judderings to a sense of blossoming potential. Its huge, echoing textures and eerie microtonal cries evoke a Birtwistle-like vastness; a striking achievement for just two players (cello and bass).

Samuel Wesley Lewis's *Sequenza* probably comes closest to the Phantasy form as Cobbett would have recognised it; taking taut neoclassical counterpoint as a springboard for a vivid urban nocturne, the glinting, piercing rhythmic patterns of its finale being derived, apparently, from motorway warning lights. Like everything here – including three Aldeburgh Purcell transcriptions and (a nod to the original Cobbett Prize) William Hurlstone's 1905-vintage *Phantasia Quartet* – it's performed with energy, sensitivity and superb refinement; bass player Lachlan Radford plays with particular subtlety and expression. I hope this project succeeds. It certainly deserves to. **Richard Bratby**

'Fantasy'

Kreisler Viennese Rhapsodic Fantasietta^a **Lark**

Appalachian Fantasy **Ravel** Tzigane^a **Schubert**

Fantasia, D934^a **Telemann** Fantasies – No 1,

TWV40:14; No 4, TWV40:17; No 5, TWV40:18

Tessa Lark *vn*^b **Amy Yang** *pf*

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Martha Argerich *pf* and friends

Hamburg Symphony Orchestra / Ion Marin

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Recorded live 2018



There are live recordings and there are live recordings. Some catapult you straight to the event while others leave you with a mere impression of what happened, and that's about it. 'Rendez-vous with Martha Argerich' is securely in the first camp. Having over the years followed various of her releases taped live at Lugano and other venues I can confirm that her characteristically high voltage as a performer remains constant more or less for the duration, even when she's not actually playing. Her coltish spirit permeates everything you hear.

Take the two Debussy sonatas, for violin and piano with Géza Hosszu-Legocky and pianist Evgeny Bozhanov, and for cello and piano with Mischa Maisky and Argerich herself, the latter where warmth and playfulness are balanced in equal measure. But the Violin Sonata is something else again, eerily erotic, whether shimmering *pianissimo* or flirting with gypsy-style inflections (Ivry Gitlis sprang to mind more than once). 'Fêtes' with Argerich and Anton Gerzenberg is bright and propulsive, while *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune*, where Argerich partners Stephen Kovacevich, bares its heart with unimpeded warmth. Ravel's *La valse* (two pianos again) finds Argerich and Nicholas Angelich exploring myriad colours, often with considerable delicacy, while the two works for violin and cello (by Ravel, with Alexandra Conunova and Edgar Moreau, and by Kodály with Guy Braunstein and Alisa Weilerstein) focus the very different characters of both pieces, coolly sophisticated in the former, folksy and often wildly impassioned in the latter.

Argerich makes Shostakovich's First Concerto sound like an off-the-cuff improvisation (how many times must that have been said of her playing?) with that

'Heifetz of the trumpet' Sergei Nakariakov constantly chasing on her heels. The E minor Piano Trio (Argerich, Weilerstein, Braunstein) parades a painful, even tragic sense of irony, while Prokofiev's *Overture on Hebrew Themes* eschews its usual bright premonitions of *Fiddler on the Roof* and instead suggests Ghetto victims dancing in their heads. Again, the mood is sullen; the heart of the piece weighs heavily. Other Prokofiev gems include a sequence of pieces from the *Cinderella* ballet arranged for two pianos by Mikhail Pletnev, involving two sets of pianists (Alexander Mogilevsky/Akane Sakai, Bozhanov/Kasparas Uinsksas), 'Quarrel' sounding like an angry finale from one of the piano sonatas (plenty of syncopations), 'Cinderella's Waltz' spinning a genuine sense of magic. The highlight of the Sonata for two violins (Tedi Papavrami and Akiko Suwanai) is the remarkably beautiful *Commodo* third movement.

Schumann is represented initially by the three *Fantasiestücke* for cello and piano, where Maisky and Argerich effect an embrace that ends in wild abandon, certainly 'with fire' as marked. More interesting still is the 'first edition 1840' of *Dichterliebe*, where Thomas Hampson, who by 2018 (the year of these concerts)

was in his early sixties, imbues each song with a wealth of feeling if without the rock-solid vocal security of his prime. Then again, some of the greatest *Dichterliebes* of yesteryear (Lotte Lehmann with Bruno Walter, Pierre Bernac with Francis Poulenc) have defied time in a similar way – just sample Hampson's entrancing account of 'Ich hab' im Traum geweinet' – and there's the added attraction of having four lovely songs that never made the first edition (you can check them out on disc 5 tracks 8, 9, 18 and 19). Hampson's feeling for words and his ability to colour them in musical terms make this a rather special performance, and being partnered by Argerich (who approaches Cortot in the same role for Panzéra and Souza) is an added boon.

As for Mendelssohn, perhaps not quite such a happy story. We're given the D minor Piano Trio arranged for flute, cello and piano, Maisky and Argerich (especially) playing brilliantly; and although flautist Susanne Barner takes to her role with what sounds like relative ease, the arrangement only really works in the Scherzo, which could easily flit among the pages of the *Midsummer Night's Dream* incidental music. The remaining movements want for the sort of expressive vibrancy that Mendelssohn must surely have had in mind when he scored the Trio's 'soprano' line for violin. The same CD includes an agile, warmly expressed and very nicely turned Beethoven Triple Concerto with Papavrami, Maisky and Argerich and the Hamburg Symphony Orchestra under Ion Marin. There are also excellent performances of Brahms's Second Violin Sonata (Suwanai and Angelich) and Rachmaninov's Cello Sonata (cellist Jing Zhao and pianist Lilya Zilberstein).

The last CD is pure fun. Annie Dutoit narrates a superbly played (and recorded) *Carnival of the Animals*, very amusingly narrated (in French – no translation is provided), with Marin conducting, and there are piano and instrumental pieces by Lecuona, Albéniz, Villoldo, Rovira and Piazzolla, while to close there's a tango-style send-up of *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* featuring the Guttman Tango Quartet. Hopefully you'll by now have guessed that this set has given me enormous pleasure and I'm convinced that it will have the same effect on you too. There are plenty of photos and 'mini-biogs' but no notes on the music. Very strongly recommended all the same. **G**



On the evidence of this musically engaging programme,

violinist Tessa Lark has a canny ability to adjust her approach according to the stylistic dictates of whatever she's playing. Her own Kentucky grass roots sing out from her *Appalachian Fantasy*, a lively essay, all sun and haystacks, played with a combination of spirit and technical brilliance. She's 'one hell of a fiddler' (if I may momentarily slip into the appropriate vernacular), the 1683 ex-Gingold Strad that she plays (courtesy of the International Violin Competition of Indianapolis) perfectly focused on Judith Sherman's fastidiously balanced recording.

The disc opens with one of three Telemann solo Fantasies programmed, a sort of 'Bach in miniature', beautiful pieces all three, dispatched by Lark with ease and telling musicality. Schubert's late violin masterwork, his *Fantasie* in C, poses rather more in the way of interpretative challenges for both pianist and violinist but Lark, ably aided by Amy Yang, achieves a performance that combines warmth and virtuosity: when the 'Sei mir gegrüsst' variations arrive her tone is pure sweetness, whereas the finale witnesses keen, crunchy arpeggios that never sound ugly.

In Kreisler's nine-minute *Viennese Rhapsodic Fantasetta* – a lovely piece that ought to be heard more often – Lark avoids the temptation to pile on the schmaltz and instead adopts a 'less is more' policy that stresses the work's aching melancholy, at least initially. The programme ends with Ravel's *Tzigane*, a good performance, though here Lark indulges the sort of overkill that she had so carefully avoided in the Kreisler, applying one or two exaggerated portamentos that sound too studied and therefore out of place. Devices such as this need to come across as played on the spur of the moment (and 'the moment' will always benefit); if they don't, the effect is oddly affected, as it is here. In other respects, Lark and Yang acquit themselves royally and the sound is, as I say, superb.

Recommended. **Rob Cowan**

'Time & Eternity'

JS Bach Chorales **Fišer Crux Hartmann**
Concerto funebre Machaut Messe de Nostre Dame – Kyrie **Martin** Polyptyque **Zorn** Kol Nidre
Patricia Kopatchinskaja *vn* **Camerata Bern**
 Alpha © ALPHA545 (77' • DDD)



The disembodied head of Patricia Kopatchinskaja rests next to a violin, its

back splintered, its neck missing. Inside the booklet, Kopatchinskaja gazes at the camera, her hands resting on a skull. Classic Pat Kop. The Moldovan-born violinist has a taste for the quirky and this extends – happily – to her programming, which is restless and adventurous. I may not always have loved her interpretations, but applaud the risk-taking behind her playing, the search for something out of the ordinary. Kopatchinskaja is no ordinary violinist.

She loves unusual juxtapositions, such as the wild swings from contemporary to pre-Baroque in 'Take Two' (12/15) and her splitting up Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* Quartet with Dowland, Gesualdo and Kurtág. We get more juxtapositions here on 'Time & Eternity', performed with Camerata Bern, of which Kopatchinskaja is artistic director. The disc features Karl Amadeus Hartmann's *Concerto funebre*, composed in response to the Nazi terror in Germany, along with Frank Martin's *Polyptyque*, inspired by six panels of the Passion of Christ painted by Duccio di Buoninsegna. Although the Hartmann is played straight through, Kopatchinskaja breaks up *Polyptyque* with transcriptions for string orchestra of Bach chorales, which land on the ear like the balm of consolation after the pain and emotion depicted in Martin's music.

The programme opens with the reciting of the Jewish Kol Nidrei, leading into John Zorn's prayer of the same title. Prayers are also offered by priests of the Polish Catholic and Russian Orthodox traditions, while the Jewish song 'Eliyahu Hanavi', which Hartmann quotes in his concerto, is sung by a Polish folk singer, along with the popular German song 'Unsterbliche Opfer' (Immortal Victims), also quoted in the Hartmann, followed by an unsettling, improvised *War Cadenza*.

This is very much a concept album and, as such, it needs to be listened to as programmed. Kopatchinskaja's playing is daring in her use of extreme dynamics, sometimes down to a spidery whisper. She is never afraid to produce a harsh, uningratiating sound – the *Concerto funebre* is properly aggressive at times – but there is sweetness too, especially from Camerata Bern in those Bach chorales. The excellent booklet features texts and colour images of the Buoninsegna panels. Not easy listening, but strongly recommended. **Mark Pullinger**

Michael Ponti

The US pianist is owed a debt of gratitude, says **Jeremy Nicholas** – his unique sound not only was enjoyed by those who heard him in concert but also is captured in countless recordings

To those of us building our collections of piano recordings in the 1960s and '70s, the sight of one particular name on an LP cover guaranteed something neglected, obscure and nearly always amazing: Michael Ponti. His concerto and solo recordings for the Vox, Vox Candide – ah, those ochre borders! – and Turnabout labels appeared with bewildering regularity, introducing us to ever more exotic and mouth-watering fare.

Over the course of little more than a decade, Ponti recorded, among other works, concertos by d'Albert (No 2), Balakirev, Berwald, Bronsart, Dvořák, Glazunov (No 2), Goetz, Henselt, Hiller, Litolff (No 3), Medtner (No 3), Moscheles (No 3), Moszkowski (E major), Raff, Reinecke (No 1), Rheinberger, Rimsky-Korsakov, Rubinstein (No 4), Scharwenka (No 2), Clara Schumann, Scriabin, Sinding, Tchaikovsky (Nos 1 and 3) and Thalberg, and the Chopin–Wilkomirski *Allegro de concert* and Lyapunov's *Rhapsody on Ukrainian Themes*. 'Marvellous piece,' he said of the d'Albert when we met back in 2007 at his beautiful home near the village of Eschenlohe in the foothills of the Bavarian Alps. 'The main theme is from *My Fair Lady*!' All of these and more are included in the Brilliant Classics 40-CD box-set 'Romantic Piano Concertos' (8/16).

The vast majority had never been recorded before nor heard for many years. This was a pioneering recording venture, and Ponti's unique gifts and innate understanding of the genre made him ideal casting for it. He managed alone what Hyperion's renowned Romantic Piano Concerto series has subsequently done with multiple pianists, and despite the variable quality of Vox's sound and the orchestral

playing, of those concertos that have since been recorded by other pianists, his performances have rarely been bettered.

Many of the concerto LPs had fillers of music by the same composers, but there were also albums of operatic paraphrases, of Alkan, of Tausig, and of the entire solo piano works of Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov and Scriabin, making Ponti in each case the first pianist to commit these complete sets to

disc. Vox paid him just \$250 per release. In 1975 he made what is, perhaps, his most unexpected foray into the studio: accompanying Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau in the songs of Charles Ives for Deutsche Grammophon, his sole appearance on the Yellow Label.

Of course, Ponti's repertoire was far wider than the

concerto recordings for which he is best known, ranging from Scarlatti and all the Beethoven sonatas (he played the complete 32 sonatas four times in Frankfurt) to Ravel and Iain Hamilton (who wrote his Second Piano Sonata for Ponti in 1973). He has recorded Liszt and Brahms solo works for Naxos, and Kuhlau's Piano Concerto (with his own bravura cadenza) for Unicorn-Kanchana. His personal first choice is a private recording of him in Brahms's Second ('my all-time favourite concerto – and always will be').

Ponti never planned to build his career and reputation by playing rarities, and until the late 1960s he had strayed little beyond the standard repertoire. His early life was peripatetic: he was born in Germany, had piano lessons from the age of six in Washington DC, followed by seven years of studies with Gilmour McDonald (also in Washington) and then six years with Erich Flinsch

Of those concertos that have since been recorded by other pianists, his performances have rarely been bettered

DEFINING MOMENTS

•1937–38 – *Birth and relocation to America*

He is born in Freiburg to an American officer with the US consulate and a German mother. The following year his mother takes him to live on the West Coast; they're joined by his father in 1941.

•1943 – *Piano lessons begin*

Has his first piano lessons in Washington DC.

•1947–54 – *Taught by a pupil of Godowsky*

Studies with Gilmour McDonald in Washington DC.

•1948 – *Bach marathon*

Plays all of Bach's '48' from memory in four recitals at the YMCA in Washington.

•1955 – *A return to his homeland*

The family returns to Germany (Frankfurt), and Ponti begins six years of piano studies with Erich Flinsch.

•1961 – *First recording*

Records a 45rpm disc of pieces by Ravel: *Jeux d'eau* and *Alborada del gracioso*.

•1964 – *First prize*

Wins the Busoni Competition in Bolsano, Italy.

•1968 – *Vox recordings begin*

Ponti makes his first recordings for Vox in September: Henselt's Concerto and then Moscheles's Concerto No 3

•1972 – *New York debut*

Plays at Alice Tully Hall on March 13.

•1984 – *Second marriage*

Marries Beatrice (1951–2017).


•2000 – *Suffers a debilitating stroke*

Loses the use of his right hand – but a few years later he re-emerges to play music for piano left hand.



(1905-90) in Frankfurt. Flinsch, an assistant in Vienna to Emil von Sauer (celebrated pupil of Liszt), set about turning Ponti into a concert pianist, telling him: 'If you can't play the Brahms-Paganini, Liszt *Don Juan* Fantasy, Schumann Toccata, Chopin *études* and late Beethoven sonatas by the time you're 20 it's time you found another profession.' Ponti rose to the challenge. 'I practised day and night until I could play them,' he told me. 'The result was, among other things, a big technique.' He never used exercises to achieve his ends. 'Why bore my fingers with exercises? I was too busy learning music to sit around practising exercises. The Henselt Concerto, for example, has enough scales and arpeggios for three lifetimes.' He also rarely practised slowly. 'I figured that if I could play a passage twice as fast with clarity, I could do it at tempo.' Ponti might not have been the most tonally charming of pianists, but the sensitivity and grace of his phrasing, allied to his trademark unbridled energy, made him *sui generis* in the recording studio and concert hall. It was once said of him: 'Looks like a lorry driver, plays like a god.' Piano lovers the world over owe him an enormous debt of gratitude.

You will notice the past tense. Ponti is no longer able to play the piano. In 2000 he suffered a stroke which deprived him

of the use of his right hand. He lost the power of speech for two months. His career, like those of Godowsky and Solomon and Cyril Smith, came to an abrupt halt. Unlike Godowsky and Solomon, however, he did not give up playing in public and re-emerged in America in April 2004 to play Ravel's Piano Concerto for the Left Hand. Further tragedy struck in 2017 when his beloved wife Beatrice ('Bieke'), who managed to combine her career as a senior anaesthetist with being his carer, died of motor neurone disease. With the onset of dementia and the loss of his mainstay, the indomitable Ponti now lives in a nursing home in Garmisch-Partenkirchen. 

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



'The Romantic Piano Concerto, Vol 3'

Vox (Moszkowski: 11/71)

This set has Thalberg's Piano Concerto, Rubinstein's D minor, Scharwenka's C minor and, best of all, Moszkowski's E major, which remains the most compelling account of this underrated, life-enhancing work, recorded by him in 1968 (his first for Vox).

Instrumental



David Fanning finds pianistic gold in Arcadi Volodos's Schubert:

'He knows how to bring spaciousness to the most technically demanding passages and inner life to the simplest' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 71](#)



Patrick Rucker hears a Shostakovich album from Andrey Gugin:

'Gugin possesses an extraordinarily versatile and agile technique, which serves an often inspired musical imagination' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 72](#)

Alkan

Symphony for Solo Piano, Op 39 Nos 4-7.
Concerto for Solo Piano, Op 39 Nos 8-10

Paul Wee *pf*

BIS (F) BIS2465 (79' • DDD)



Surprisingly, this is the first time that Alkan's *Symphony for Solo Piano* and *Concerto*

for *Solo Piano* have appeared together on a single disc. The aptly named *Symphony* comprises four études (Nos 4-7), and its companion *Concerto* a further three études (Nos 8-10), from Alkan's set of *Douze Études dans tous les tons mineurs*, his Op 39, published in 1857. The movements of both works are linked by a progressive tonality, each written in a key a perfect fourth above its predecessor. Those of the *Symphony* move from C minor to F minor, B flat minor and E flat minor; the *Concerto* from G sharp minor to C sharp minor and finally to F sharp minor.

Here I must declare an interest: I am one of those who firmly believes that Alkan is a genius on a level with Chopin, Liszt and Berlioz, and that the *Symphony* and *Concerto* are two high points in the entire literature of the piano. Many, I know, disagree with that view. Perhaps this recording might persuade the doubters to give them another hearing because, on several levels, it is quite extraordinary.

Alkan's Op 39 *Études* are way, way beyond the reach of most pianists, and to the best of my knowledge only five pianists have recorded both the *Symphony* and the *Concerto* – Ronald Smith, Jack Gibbons, Stephanie McCallum, Vincenzo Maltempo and Marc-André Hamelin. The performances on this disc equal and sometimes surpass all five. That is astonishing enough; but what is almost incredible is that the soloist Paul Wee is not a professional pianist but a highly successful international commercial London lawyer.

The precision of his attack, the clarity of the part-playing, the linear focus and structural grasp of each movement of the *Symphony* are quite thrilling to experience – and when Alkan marks the final movement *Presto*, Wee takes him at his word. The first movement of the *Concerto* – 72 pages and 1343 bars in length, making it longer than the entire *Hammerklavier* Sonata – is a roller coaster utilising every conceivable pianistic effect. There are few moments of respite. Wee's technical command is awesome by any standards but he is no mere note-spinner, adding his own drama and colour to the bravura writing while being equally alive to the moments of lyrical repose. The spontaneity and drive of his playing smash the sterile confines of the studio. It is urgent, committed, compelling. In the finale (marked *alla barbaresca*), Wee's brilliant tone and clarion-clear bass lines present a clear contrast to Hamelin's smoother-toned, more patrician reading that is not, unlike Wee's, relentlessly aggressive.

But, frankly, this is one of those discs I feel disinclined to niggle over small discrepancies and matters of personal taste. It will certainly be one of my Discs of the Year. It could become a classic. A tip of the hat to producer Jeremy Hayes and sound engineer David Hinitt, as well as to Bryce Morrison and Mike Spring for their seminal roles in the venture – and to Robert von Bahr of BIS for taking a punt. But most of all to the remarkable Paul Wee on his recording debut.

Jeremy Nicholas

Balakirev

'Complete Piano Works, Vol 5:

Original Works and Transcriptions'

Balakirev Gondellied. Impromptu (after Chopin's Preludes). Polonaise brillante. Réminiscences de l'opéra 'La vie pour le Czar' (Glinka). Tarantella **Beethoven/Balakirev** String Quartets: No 8, Op 59 No 2 - Allegretto; No 13, Op 130 - Cavatina **Chopin** Piano Concerto No 1, Op 11 - Larghetto (arr Balakirev). Scherzo No 2, Op 31 (with Balakirev's cadenza) **Glinka**/

Balakirev Chernomor's March (Ruslan and Ludmilla) **Liszt** Mazurka brillante, S221. Mazurka brillante, S221 (with Balakirev's coda)

Nicholas Walker *pf*

Grand Piano (F) GP811 (80' • DDD)



Nicholas Walker has been toiling away virtually unnoticed in the Balakirev vineyard

for the past few decades. Many will recall the two volumes from the late 1990s for ASV, intended as a complete survey of all the solo works. That never came to fruition due to the label's demise. Operating under the radar once more, Walker has re-embarked on this same mission and has now reached Vol 5.

This one is particularly fascinating for transcription junkies, beginning with the spectacular (and spectacularly difficult) *Reminiscences* on Glinka's *A Life for the Czar*, famous from Earl Wild's 1969 recording (on the flip side of his Scharwenka B flat minor *Concerto* LP – RCA, 2/70). Walker is quite his equal – and that is saying something – and is also beautifully recorded in a realistic, sympathetic acoustic (St Silas, Kentish Town, with producer Jeremy Hayes and engineer Ben Connellan). Indeed, Walker's playing throughout this absorbing disc is a pleasure to hear, with a sophisticated tonal palette and eschewing any superficial virtuosity: 'bravura with integrity' is how I would describe it. Why don't we hear more of him?

The transcription of the *Romanza* from Chopin's E minor *Concerto* (another Wild favourite) ingeniously melds the piano part with the bassoon solos. This precedes the *Impromptu* (after Chopin's Preludes), in which the E flat minor and B major Preludes are merged into a single original composition, and is followed by the first recording of Balakirev's cadenza to Chopin's *Scherzo* No 2. Chopin's original text is familiar enough; Liszt's *Mazurka brillante* is not,

GRAMOPHONE *talks to ...**Paul Wee*

The pianist discusses his debut album, comprising two of Alkan's most ferociously demanding works, and balancing life as a lawyer

When did you first start playing Alkan, and what attracted you to his music?

I first encountered Alkan, and began playing his works, as a high school student in New York. I was drawn to the dramatic intensity of his musical narratives (especially in works like the *Symphony*, the *Concerto*, the *Grande Sonate* and the *Sonatine*), the striking novelty of his musical language and the creativity and revelry of his pianism.

Both the *Symphony* and, especially, the *Concerto* have fearsome reputations. Do you think this is justified?

No, if the aim is merely to navigate the notes accurately. Even though these works sometimes approach the limits of pianistic possibility, Alkan's writing is unfailingly idiomatic and naturally pianistic. But that would be to miss the point. The *Symphony* and the *Concerto* are written as epics, and call for high-voltage pianism: risks must be taken and sparks must fly, and any caution-driven, 'safety-first' performance will fall flat. The writing is also cruelly unforgiving, and – pianistic though it may be – is all too easily spoiled by inaccurate or inadequate execution. Breathing life into these works therefore entails the traversal of a knife-edge, across relentless canvases (especially the

50-minute wingspan of the *Concerto*) that require an extraordinary degree of stamina: physical, mental and artistic. So, if the aim is instead to do these works justice: absolutely.

After studying the piano, you went on to study Law and are now an international barrister. How do you manage to maintain your piano-playing to such a high level?

My practice at the Bar is demanding, and I frequently go for weeks without touching a piano. But music and the piano are my passions, and constantly on my mind, even when I don't have time to play. My technique fortunately requires little upkeep, and can withstand time away from the piano without deteriorating; for that, I must credit my last teacher, Nina Svetlanova. I am also lucky to be a relatively quick learner. Lastly, the support of Gray's Inn, my Inn of Court, has been invaluable. I have been playing regular recitals at Gray's over the past decade, which have provided a wonderful impetus and



platform for my continued pursuit of pianism at the highest level. Overall, if perhaps paradoxically, I think that being a barrister makes me a better pianist, and being a pianist makes me a better barrister.

Are you going to make more recordings?

Yes! BIS and I have multiple further recordings planned. The first will feature Thalberg's complete *L'art du chant appliqué au piano*, Op 70, a glorious celebration of sonic and lyrical beauty, and the art of pianistic illusion (perhaps the aspects of pianism that I treasure most). The second will be a concerto recording, featuring two lesser-recorded piano concertos that I dearly adore. More on that another time ...

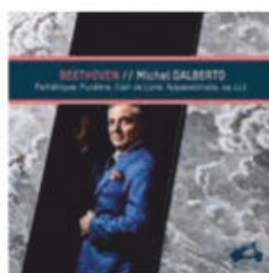
so Walker plays the piece through, then repeats it with Balakirev's coda. Then come perhaps the most unexpected works: transcriptions of two movements from a couple of Beethoven string quartets. Three original works round off the programme, the most striking of which is the *Tarantella* (1901), vigorous, relentless, demanding, with glimpses of figures from *Tamara* and *Islamey*. Last of all is Balakirev's earliest surviving piece, a Chopinesque Polonaise. Nicholas Walker's own excellent booklet is the cherry on the top. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Beethoven

Piano Sonatas – No 8, 'Pathétique', Op 13; No 12, Op 26; No 14, 'Moonlight', Op 27 No 2; No 23, 'Appassionata', Op 57; No 32, Op 111

Michel Dalberto *pf*

La Dolce Volta (M) (2) LDV78/9 (106' • DDD)



Michel Dalberto's Beethoven has mellowed since his sparkling early-1980s

recordings of the Op 2 and Op 10 trilogies. The music's brash edges are tempered through stronger linear awareness, along with particular care over trills, turns and other embellishments. Dalberto plays down the pomp of the *Grave* introduction to the *Pathétique*'s first movement by granting more space and breathing room to phrase ends, but his conscientious fingerwork in the *Allegro* lacks the lightness and fire one hears from Yundi or Jonathan Biss, among recent contenders. Conversely, the *Adagio* takes gentle *cantabile* wing, while the Rondo's

pronounced left-hand inflections make an intriguing foil to the right hand's refined embellishments.

Most interpreters strive for unity and uniformity in Op 26's first-movement variations. Dalberto instead imbues each variation with a specific character. By playing the left hand slightly ahead of the right, he underlines Var 4's marked legato and staccato contrasts. The perpetual-motion finale's cascading elegance falls easily on the ear, albeit without Sviatoslav Richter's cutting edge. Dalberto takes considerable metrical leeway in the *Moonlight*'s famous *Adagio sostenuto*; yet the liberties organically coalesce, as opposed to the pianist's mincingly drawn-out *Allegretto*. The *Presto* is clear and steady, if not quite *agitato* enough for my taste.

The *Appassionata*'s central variations showcase Dalberto's full-bodied and

singing tone at optimum capacity, even if the outer movements keep the proverbial lion's roar at safe bay. Similarly, telltale rhetorical touches occasionally pull focus from the cumulative flow in Op 111's first-movement development and at certain cadence points throughout the Arietta. But Dalberto's multi-dimensional textural deployment in the long chains of trills and the final peroration is positively otherworldly: exactly how otherworldly piano-writing ought to sound! As usual, La Dolce Volta offers classy, generous packaging with multi-language texts.

Jed Distler

Haydn

'Piano Sonatas, Vol 2'

Piano Sonatas – HobXVI:32; HobXVI:37; HobXVI:40; HobXVI:47; HobXVI:48; HobXVI:49

Leon McCawley *pf*

Somm Céleste © SOMMCD0602 (77' • DDD)



Light of touch, stylistically assured and brimful of intelligence and wit,

Leon McCawley's second instalment of Haydn sonatas for Somm fairly sparkles with delight. This follows his 2016 recording of four sonatas plus the F minor Variations (2/17) and, while no mention is made of a 'complete' Haydn sonata set, one hopes that the series will continue, whatever its purview.

Haydn's multifarious moods are captured with the ease of a master portraitist, working with the utmost economy of means. In these five very different sonatas, one never feels that the musical discourse veers toward overstatement: eloquence is achieved with simplicity, allowing the richness of Haydn's imagination to shine brightly throughout.

Though seldom identified with opera today, Haydn wrote some two dozen of them. The Sonata in E minor (HobXVI:47) opens with an *Adagio* that could easily double for a fully developed scena in one of the Eszterháza operas, with the heroine sharing her melancholy indecision, only to hit upon her dilemma's solution in the ensuing *Allegro*.

Haydn of the *Sturm und Drang* symphonies seems to step forward in the B minor Sonata (No 32). McCawley vividly evokes the seriousness of the powerful *Allegro*, before transitioning seamlessly into a Minuet in B major, with a minor-key Trio suggesting that relief will be short-lived. In the *Presto* finale, intrigue returns with polyphonic passagework and insistent

rhythms that bring the symphonic drama to a tragic conclusion.

Among these five sonatas are three minuets, each as varied in character as their expressive purpose within the context of their respective sonatas, yet always true to the essential poise of 18th-century dance. And this may be the key to McCawley's success as a Haydn interpreter. Reliant on touch and articulation within a relatively restrained dynamic compass, he vividly recreates the breadth and depth of Haydn's musical imagination on the modern Steinway in a way that never seems overblown, but always proportionate.

McCawley has a great deal to say in this music, and does so with eloquence and grace. I look forward to hearing a lot more.

Patrick Rucker

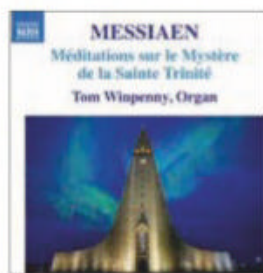
Messiaen

Méditations sur le Mystère de la Sainte Trinité

Tom Winpenny *org*

Naxos © 8 573979 (75' • DDD)

Played on the organ of the Hallgrímskirkja, Reykjavík



After composing *La Transfiguration* and attending its fraught premiere in Lisbon

in 1968, Messiaen quite swiftly worked up into a concert cycle the evening of improvisations he had played for the Feast of the Holy Trinity in 1967. He was 60, and by then in the habit of writing himself back into form at the organ bench having lately spent all his energies on a major work.

When improvising after a service, Messiaen would shout out the scriptural subject from the organ loft at Saint-Trinité – YouTube furnishes some valuable examples – and Tom Winpenny brings the composer's voice to mind, thundering out the main theme with the kind of austere, plain-spoken grandeur common to his opening gambits.

In the cycle Messiaen unveiled a technique of *langage communicable* – assigning a pitch, duration and even timbre to A, B, C and so on, to spell out theological concepts – which has come in for some stick. Composing by letters, you could call it. Perhaps Winpenny's unassuming virtuosity complements this new turn of phrase – previous instalments of his ongoing cycle for Naxos have been judged cool and distant by some of my colleagues, though not by me – but then the *Méditations* are not the place for perfumed ecstasy any more than Messiaen's previous large-scale cycle, the *Livre d'orgue*.

Winpenny's choice of the Klais organ in the airy acoustic of Reykjavík's Lutheran church seems admirably suited to Messiaen's abrupt juxtapositions, and in any case he shades most sensitively the Gregorian-accented melodies (try 'Dieu et simple', track 8) while bringing vividly to life the yellowhammer's persistent chirp and – perhaps my own favourite of his avian *objets trouvés* – the mournful monotone of Tengmalm's Owl.

With another excellent recording supervised by Adrian Lucas and usefully demystifying notes by Winpenny himself, it's another fine instalment in a series that offers a strong, Anglo-Saxon alternative to the sometimes overwhelming splendour of Jennifer Bate in Beauvais and Olivier Latry at Notre-Dame (Regis and DG, 5/02).

Anyone in possession of Gillian Weir's cycle on the Frobenius organ at Aarhus Cathedral (originally on Collins Classics, 12/94, reissued by Priory) will be familiar with the attractions of Messiaen from the cold north. **Peter Quantrill**

Pott

Prelude in G sharp minor. A Room at the End of the Mind. Scherzo-Notturmo. The Song of Amergin. Toccata on Two Christmas Carols. Venezia

Jeremy Filsell *pf*

Acis © APL52078 (74' • DDD)



'One of those composers who seldom tests boundaries, preferring to turn back in search of roads less taken', is how Francis Pott describes himself.

In other words, conservative, or even 'derrière-garde'. To which I reply: who cares? For Pott's piano music communicates warmth, beauty, sophistication and heartfelt expression. It falls easily and memorably both on the ear and (presumably) in Jeremy Filsell's expertly caressing fingers.

Take *Venezia*, for example. The ambling passagework gently grooves in cruise control, offset, however, by unexpected melodic twists or ornaments. The *Scherzo-Notturmo* begins with seemingly innocuous pentatonic arpeggios that soon bump into harmonies one never saw coming. Towards the end, softer, more introspective sequences navigate darker, more brooding waters. Twelve delightfully diverse short character studies comprise *A Room at the End of the Mind*, the cycle from which this CD takes its title. Since space prevents detailed descriptions for each piece, I'll

draw attention to 'The Church Mouse' and its wry alternations between scampering high jinks and moments of not-so-comfortable respite. 'Passamezzo' might be described as Rachmaninov's 'Vocalise' as rewritten centuries earlier by William Byrd. 'The king went forth to Normandy' puts that traditional Agincourt carol through energetic and virtuoso paces, barely leaving the pianist breathing room, yet never sounding the least cluttered or overwritten.

Pott's 1983 *The Song of Amergin* is the collection's one large-scale opus. Its first two and a half minutes are analogous to the opening of Debussy's *La mer* translated into Middle English, with the music slowly yet decisively materialising from almost nothing. From that point on, the textures grow relentlessly energetic and chordal, even orchestral in nature, winding down to quiet in the last few minutes. Pott's excellent ability to control harmonic tension and release over large stretches of time prevents the thick ambience from coming off heavy. On the other hand, such textures grow increasingly diffuse and, for the lack of a better word, 'swimmy' via Acis's distant and overly reverberant engineering.

In short, the myriad attractions of Pott's palpable musical gifts belie the modest and sometimes self-deprecating persona he depicts in his extensive booklet notes.

Jed Distler

Prokofiev

Piano Sonatas – No 4, Op 29;

No 7, Op 83; No 9, Op 103

Alexander Melnikov *pf*

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2203 (58' • DDD)



The second instalment of Melnikov's Prokofiev sonatas covers a kaleidoscope

of temperaments. From the sombre and brooding Fourth through the viscerally uncompromising Seventh to the shyly restrained and hesitant Ninth, he displays a highly individual concept of Prokofiev's evolution. For all its vacillations, something in Melnikov's choice of colours conveys an overall feeling of austerity and looming danger that is not quite like anyone else's vision. Surrounded in this way by menacing gloom, the brief courageous outbursts in the Ninth Sonata and the intimate episodes of daydreaming in the second movement of the Fourth are extraordinarily moving. Few pianists have come this close to Richter in making such a strong case for both comparatively neglected works. Some

of Richter's poetry has been replaced by eeriness, as in the hallucinogenic opening theme of the Fourth Sonata's first movement, which becomes spookier with each return. Here and in the enigmatic Ninth, Melnikov achieves a perfect balance between spontaneity, sensitivity to sudden mood changes, and controlled architectural thinking. The impression of translucence in the finale of the Ninth, despite the complex contrapuntal texture, is also a marvel. There is something infinitely touching in the discretion of this sonata, especially its subdued ending – like an actor who vanishes without returning to take a bow – and Melnikov is a master at portraying it.

The more familiar exhibitionist Prokofiev comes on stage in the Seventh Sonata, the more so for being enveloped between two of his most reticent works. But even amid the freewheeling onrush, Melnikov has a corner of his foot on the brake, not so as to detract from the energy but to ensure that it accumulates over the long term. This is far from the demonic exhilaration of Pollini's account, in particular his frenzied finale. But I prefer Melnikov's comparatively restrained solution to Boris Giltburg's determination to match Pollini's tempo (even beating it by a few seconds), which comes at the expense of turning the movement into a supercar demonstration. **Michelle Assay**

Sonata No 4 – selected comparison:

Richter (6/02) (BBCL) BBCL4082-2

Sonata No 7 – selected comparison:

Pollini (6/72^R, 6/95) (DG) 447 431-2GOR

Giltburg (A/12) (ORCH) ORC100023

Prokofiev • Rachmaninov

Prokofiev Étude, Op 2 No 2. Piano Sonata No 4, Op 29. Ten Pieces from *Romeo and Juliet*, Op 75 – Nos 2, 6, 7, & 10 **Rachmaninov** Études-tableaux, Op 39 – No 2; No 6. Piano Sonata No 2, Op 36. Vocalise, Op 34 No 14

Sandro Nebieridze *pf*

Harmonia Mundi © HMN91 6115 (72' • DDD)



The Harmonia Nova series, of which this is Vol 9, is dedicated to 'young artists singled out for their exceptional talents'. Sandro Nebieridze more than qualifies. He hails from Tbilisi and, being born in 2001, becomes the first pianist I have reviewed to have been born in the 21st century. With a fair wind and all things being equal, he could be playing the piano well into the 2080s.

From the first bars of Rachmaninov's Second Sonata you are swept up in a

maelstrom of emotion. The red light clearly holds no terrors for him as he relishes the full sonority of a richly voiced instrument (well recorded by Alban Moraud), ratcheting up the tension in the final pages to a controlled frenzy without any loss of clarity in the ecstatic peroration. He contrasts this with the first of the two A minor *Études-tableaux* from Op 39 (the one that, on the page, looks as though it is quite easy to play). This in turn leads to a central Prokofiev section with four pieces from *Romeo and Juliet*, rather than all 10, and the Piano Sonata No 4, in both of which Nebieridze demonstrates the same innate affinity with the composer as he has with Rachmaninov. One could take issue with a sometimes cavalier regard of dynamics in the sonata, and Nikolai Lugansky for one offers a more tonally varied and playful version of that wonderfully boisterous finale. But Nebieridze's is a performance that can hold its head high among stiff competition.

Then we return to Rachmaninov in the form of the other Op 39 A minor *Étude-tableau* (the difficult one), which Rachmaninov recorded in 1925. Again, a hugely confident and impressive reading, as is the lightning-fast (1'18"), rarely heard Prokofiev Étude from Op 2. In fact the only performance that does not quite hit the mark is the final one of *Vocalise* (the transcriber is unnamed but it bears a close resemblance to that made in 1951 by Alan Richardson). At a tempo that brings it in at 7'21", Rachmaninov's seamless song is barely supportable. I don't need to be told how beautiful it is in every bar. The melody does that by itself. Less, on this occasion, is more.

Already a prize-winning composer with a piano concerto, a cello sonata, a chamber opera and various other works under his belt, we shall doubtless be hearing a lot more from Nebieridze in the future.

Jeremy Nicholas

Prokofiev Sonata No 4 – selected comparison:

Lugansky (4/04^R) (WARN) 2564 66618-9

Ravel • Stravinsky

Ravel Miroirs. La valse

Stravinsky Three Movements from *Petrushka*. The *Firebird* (transcr Agosti) – *Danse infernale*; *Berceuse*; *Finale*

Beatrice Rana *pf*

Warner Classics © 9029 54110-9 (72' • DDD)



Since her silver medal at the 2013 Van Cliburn Competition, I've followed the



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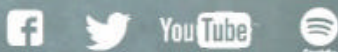
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career of Beatrice Rana with great interest. When introducing friends who aren't musicians to her recordings, I usually mention a couple of things. Rana, who is the daughter of two professional pianists, tells the story that, when she was very young, it was easier for her to communicate with the piano than with speech. She is as authentic as they come and plays everything, be it the *Goldberg Variations* or the Prokofiev Second, as though nothing in the world could be more important. Rana's new Warner release, recorded in June and September of this year, beautifully captures pre-war Paris with Ravel's *Miroirs* and two of Stravinsky's ballets for Diaghilev, with *La valse* thrown in as a post-war snapshot.

Though we had a taste of Rana's Ravel in *Gaspard de la nuit* on her first recording after the Cliburn (Harmonia Mundi, 2/14), the pieces here underscore the originality of her approach to the composer. Her seemingly infinite variety of touch, particularly at the quiet end of the dynamic spectrum, stands her in good stead, say, with a piece such as 'Noctuelles', where acutely differentiated levels of *pianissimo* make it difficult to distinguish the protean flight of the moths from the dust in their wake. Rana communicates her musical imagery with an ease and economy that belies its power. The heat in 'Oiseaux tristes' is almost palpable, muting the birds' song as it wilts the entire landscape. Even a threadbare warhorse such as 'Alborada del gracioso' emerges freshly vibrant with a blend of uncommon harmonic emphases and kinetic vitality.

As evocative as the Ravel pieces undoubtedly are, the two Stravinsky ballet transcriptions belong in a category that can only be described as conjury. When all is said and done, you may ask yourself, as I did, where did these brilliant colours evoking Bakst come from, this protean energy punctuated by such rhythmic authority, these reserves of power? Or perhaps find yourself pulling out your Montoux or Boulez to see if the orchestral originals could really sound so prosaic in comparison.

There's no question that Rana is an immensely resourceful pianist who can pull off dazzling effects when warranted. But it is her sane, thoughtful music-making, inerrant in focus, often strikingly original and always from the heart, that sets her apart. Not many 26-year-olds in my experience can boast artistry so satisfyingly complete. **Patrick Rucker**

D Scarlatti

52 Keyboard Sonatas

Lucas Debargue *pf*

Sony Classical ® ④ 19075 94446-2 (3h 55' • DDD)



With the bar for Scarlatti interpretation set as high as it is today by harpsichordists of the communicative depth and technical brilliance of Pierre Hantai and Jean Rondeau, pianists do well to think twice before recording this enticing but treacherous repertory. Clearly Lucas Debargue has done so, and then some, as demonstrated in these four new discs of 52 Scarlatti sonatas. Though his readings are unabashedly pianistic, they exhibit more than a passing acquaintance with contemporary Baroque performance practice. In his booklet notes, Debargue graciously acknowledges his indebtedness to the late American harpsichordist Scott Ross (still the only musician to have recorded all 555 canonic sonatas), as indeed Horowitz acknowledged Ralph Kirkpatrick in his 1964 Scarlatti recording. Yet ultimately it is the vitality and intelligence of the music-making, the ability to make the notes on the page dance and sing, which dictates success or failure, whatever the instrument.

One of the joys of this generous set is the expressive clarity of Debargue's piano sound, unclouded by pedal. The sonatas are well chosen and thoughtfully arranged, 13 to a disc, each disc conceived as a well-rounded mini-recital. Debargue plays virtually all the repeats, occasionally slightly embellishing them the second time through.

To Debargue's great credit, each of these 52 sonatas emerges with a uniquely distinctive character and, despite the similarity of their formal layout, attention never flags. Among the more brilliant sonatas – the two D major sonatas, Kk45 and Kk414, G major Kk125 or F major Kk469, for instance – Debargue's speed and bravura are delivered with extraordinary clarity and lightness of touch. The most intricate figurations never sound notey, but speak with stylish eloquence. He relishes Scarlatti's frequent juxtapositions of contrasting affects, as in the A major Kk268, where insistent dissonance interrupts frolicsome joy, or when flamenco-like strumming obtrudes in the otherwise genteel and witty G major Kk105, or the mercurial shifts of mood in C minor Kk115. The evocations of grand processions laced with fanfares so beloved of Scarlatti, among them C major Kk242, G major Kk491 and C major Kk461, are always proportionate and, for all their exuberance, maintain a haughty Spanish

dignity. In the more lyrical sonatas, such as the tender longing of D major Kk543, the touching simplicity of F minor Kk462 or the haunting Moorish-inflected C sharp minor Kk247, Debargue's beautifully chaste *cantabile* takes flight.

I will confess that, despite Debargue's unquestionable gifts, there have been elements of his interpretation in previous recordings that struck me as unsettled and confused. Here, I am happy to report, he sounds both completely on top of his game and staking out new interpretative territory with confident mastery. By any measure, this is an ambitious project, handsomely realised. **Patrick Rucker**

Schubert

Piano Sonata No 20, D959.

Minuets - D334; D335; D600/610

Arcadi Volodos *pf*

Sony Classical ® 19075 86829-2;

® ④ 19075 86829-1 (56' • DDD)



Is it possible to make Schubert too beautiful? To put it another way: where

is the line between naturally beautiful and artificially beautified? The question(s) crossed my mind listening to Volodos in the A major Sonata. Every phrase is so exquisitely turned, so perfectly graded in its nuances, so ideally blended – harmonically, melodically and in relation to what comes before and after – that it could be placed on exhibit for all to wonder at. Like all the great virtuosos, he knows how to bring spaciousness to the most technically demanding passages and inner life to the simplest. Soft dynamics in particular are near-miraculous. Volodos can whisper without losing definition, and then fine down his tone even further, scrupulously following Schubert's markings. I wish I could wrap up his piano, technician, acoustic and recording engineers in a package and take them home with me. Not to mention his technique.

What then of the broader picture? Only in the slow movement – more *Lento assai* than Schubert's *Andantino* – could the tempos be described as controversial; and even here the eloquence and fine nuance of the playing make it easy to capitulate. There is nothing superficial about Volodos's emotional response, either here or in the troubled recesses of the Scherzo and Trio. And when the finale reaches its *Presto* coda, he lets loose his inner virtuoso to thrilling effect.

The problem – if it is a problem – is the sheer abundance of pianistic marvels. I do love the way Volodos eases into and through the first movement's second subject; but he weaves exactly the same spell on the repeat, and in the recapitulation, and the magic thereby gives way to routine. Even at its first appearance the theme would surely have been even more effective had its *pianissimo* not been pre-empted earlier on; and do the long notes have to stretch expressively the same way every time? Then wouldn't the development section make its dramatic point more clearly if it travelled a little less bumpily in the early stages?

When every picture in the gallery is a masterpiece, somehow one's responses become dulled. I wonder if Volodos in live performance would be slightly less concerned with making every phrase special and find ways to let the most special of them stand in greater relief. Even the extraordinary slow-release brainstorm at the heart of the slow movement is so perfectly chiselled that its shock value is somehow tamed.

Happy the collector with all four selected comparisons on their shelves, though none is beyond criticism. For me, neither Perahia nor Uchida are quite at their starry finest in this work. Decca's recording for Lupu has some steeliness in *fortissimo*, and Brendel's live BBC account sounds less than ideally clear. But then Lupu's tempos are wonderfully natural, and neither he nor Brendel make the mistake of overloading the structure with special moments. Brendel's finale takes the steadiest *Allegretto* of all, to the great benefit of its expressive/dramatic relationship to the rest of the work.

Volodos's three minuets are cannily chosen for their family resemblances to the sonata. Perhaps he slightly forces a point by taking the C sharp minor, D600 – plausibly united with the unattached E major Trio, D610 – far slower than a minuet could ever be danced, presumably in order to draw out an affinity with the sonata's slow movement. But I can perfectly see the point of not adding another sonata to the disc. And whatever reservations I may have expressed, Volodos is in a world of his own for sheer pianistic finesse.

David Fanning

Sonata – selected comparisons:

Lupu (8/77^R) (DECC) 475 7074DC4

Uchida (9/98^R) (PHIL) 475 6282PB8

Brendel (3/01) (PHIL) 456 573-2PM2

Perahia (8/03) (SONY) ➔ S2K87706

Shostakovich

Piano Sonatas – No 1, Op 12; No 2, Op 61.

24 Preludes, Op 34. The Limpid Stream,

Op 39 – Nocturne

Andrey Gugnin *pf*

Hyperion © CDA68267 (79' • DDD)



The controversy surrounding the 1979 publication of Solomon Volkov's *Testimony*,

four years after the death of Dmitry Shostakovich in Moscow, has assured the composer's posthumous reputation a musicological and popular currency unlike any other figure in 20th-century music. Of the artists whose careers were contorted or ended by the Soviet system, ranging from Solzhenitsyn, Akhmatova, Mandelstam and Pasternak to Yevtushenko, Eisenstein, Tarkovsky and Komar & Melamid, none perhaps has emerged as more emblematic than Shostakovich. Alternately the poster child and whipping boy of Soviet music throughout his life, with all the sinister implications of such ambiguity, the wonder is that he continued creating until the end. These circumstances place dispassionate valuation of Shostakovich's artistic legacy virtually beyond reach, and probably will for some time. Yet compared with the impenetrable thicket of coded ideological portent now ascribed to the symphonies and string quartets, the piano music seems to offer a sunlit clearing. Enter Andrey Gugnin, of whose piano-playing it's all but impossible to get enough.

Gugnin was born in 1987, making him four years old when the USSR finally called it a night. It might be argued that, to the extent that he is an inheritor of Soviet traditions but came of age under the Russian Federation, Gugnin is less burdened with the extramusical baggage that seems the starting point of so many Shostakovich interpretations. More relevantly, Gugnin possesses an extraordinarily versatile and agile technique, which serves an often inspired musical imagination.

The Preludes, Op 34, are the heart of the recording. These are the pieces in which Shostakovich's pianistic imagination ranges most freely; their mercurial flights of fancy seem tailor-made to Gugnin's gifts. No 4, the longest at 3'02", unfolds in faux-learned polyphony, delivered here with relaxed insouciance. Those requiring the utmost pianistic finesse – No 2, No 10 with its delicate trills or the gentle barcarolle-like rocking of No 19, for instance – are poised and discreet, without veering toward preciousness. No 13 could

be a mini-sketch for the Pyramus and Thisbe scene of Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* a quarter of a century before the fact. Gugnin tosses off some of the more virtuoso, such as Nos 5, 9 and 20, as mere child's play. He also discerns great variety in Shostakovich's antic circus mode, be it the riotous No 11, the toy soldiers of No 16 or the rude polka of No 24, each containing the perfect blend of slapstick, mockery and the caustic grotesque. Gugnin moves between these vividly delineated miniatures so effortlessly that William Kapell's 1945 recording of a few of them sounds almost prosaic by comparison.

Shostakovich's Second Sonata, like his piano masterpiece, the Second Piano Trio, was written in response to the death of a friend, in this case a pianist at the St Petersburg Conservatory, Leonid Nikolayev, who taught Sofronitsky and Yudina as well as the composer. Gugnin, who after all is the past master of the Beethoven-Liszt symphonies, evokes all the colours of Shostakovich's mature orchestral palette in this stunning performance. Following the desolation of the *Largo* middle movement, a vast lake of lonely bereavement, the extended finale develops an inexorable momentum and mass that is irresistible.

This splendidly recorded disc also contains a superb First Sonata and a tiny excerpt from the ballet *The Limpid Stream*. I urge you not to miss it. We're going to be hearing a great deal more from Andrey Gugnin. **Patrick Rucker**

Robert Casadesus



'The Complete French Columbia Recordings'

Beethoven Piano Sonata No 26, 'Les adieux',

Op 81a **Caplet** L'Épiphanie – Danse des petits

nègres^a **Casadesus** Flute Sonata, Op 18^b

Chabrier Impromptu. Scherzo-valse **Chopin**

Four Ballades. Mazurka No 13, Op 17 No 4

Debussy Cello Sonata^a **Fauré** Impromptu No 5,

Op 102. Piano Quartet No 1, Op 15^c. Prélude,

Op 103 No 5 **Mozart** Piano Concertos – No 24,

K491^d; No 26, 'Coronation', K537^e. Rondo, K485

Ravel Jeux d'eau **D Scarlatti** Keyboard Sonatas –

Kk9; Kk13; Kk14; Kk23; Kk27; Kk96; Kk125; Kk198;

Kk377; Kk430; Kk533 **Schubert** Deutsche Tänze,

D790 – Nos 1, 3-8 & 11. Piano Sonata No 15, D664

Schumann Études symphoniques, Op 13. Vogel

als Prophet, Op 82 No 7 **Séverac** Cerdaña –

Le retour des muletiers **Weber** Konzertstück,

Op 79^f **Witkowski** Mon lac^g

Robert Casadesus *pf* with ^b**René Le Roy** *fl* ^c**Joseph**

Calvet *vn* ^a**Léon Pascal** *va* ^a**Maurice Maréchal**,

^c**Paul Mas** *vcs* ^e**Orchestre des Concert Straram /**

Walther Straram; ^d**Orchestre Symphonique de**

Paris / ^d**Eugène Bigot**, ^g**Georges Martin Witkowski**

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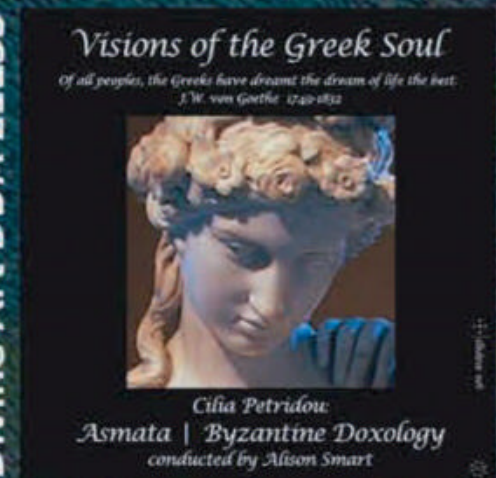
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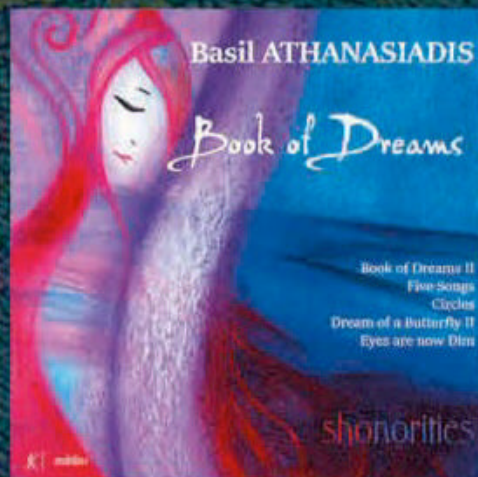
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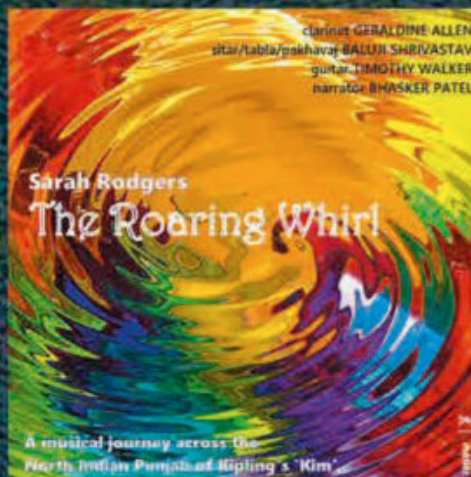
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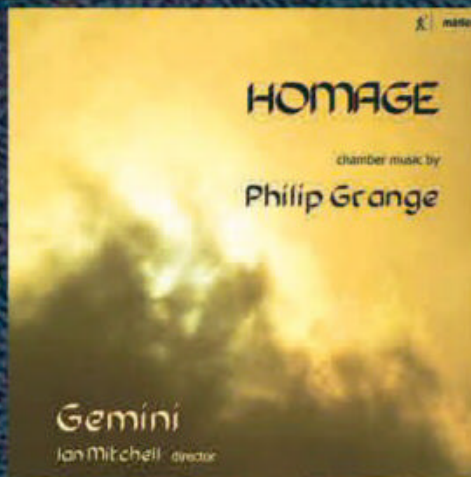
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In the wake of Sony Classical's massively comprehensive box-set devoted to Robert

Casadesu's American Columbia recordings (6/19), APR fleshes out the picture, so to speak, with the first complete reissue of the pianist's pre-war French Columbia 78s. Evidently Casadesu was Casadesu from the start. The 11 Scarlatti sonatas recorded in 1937 that open disc 1 alone attest to the pianist's high craftsmanship.

Just to cite one example, the G major Kk125 Sonata's ornaments are firmly in place, the runs are impeccably even and the rhythmic definition as centred as possible. Similarly, the first of Casadesu's three recordings of Mozart's C minor Concerto essentially presents the same tasteful, polished and somewhat cool-headed interpreter familiar from his mono and stereo LP versions with George Szell, but with lousy orchestral support and cramped, muffled sound. Previously unpublished test pressings of a 1931 Mozart *Coronation* Concerto (missing the *Larghetto*'s first 71 bars) offer much better sound and conducting, along with a more impetuous soloist in the finale compared alongside his Szell remakes.

In contrast to the overly fast and glib Mozart D major Rondo, the similarly brisk outer movements of Beethoven's *Les adieux* Sonata crackle more energetically in 1932 than they would 25 years later. Although Casadesu's straightforward and literal dispatch of Schubert's 'little' A major Sonata is no match for the breadth and grace of Myra Hess's 78rpm version, he's all genial charm in a selection of the composer's *German Dances*. And what staggering poise and élan he brings to the second half of Weber's *Konzerstück*, perhaps a shade more exciting here in 1935 than in the Szell/Cleveland recording 17 years later.

Rehearing Casadesu's 1928 Schumann *Symphonic Études*, I find it far more volatile and imaginatively nuanced than I had remembered, certainly to a higher degree than in the pianist's more polished LP-era studio remakes and his live 1964 traversal. I especially like the way the *Presto possibile* Étude No 9's difficult repeated chords slightly speed up towards the middle, yet never splinter for a second!

Years ago I reviewed an earlier reissue of Casadesu's 1930 Chopin Ballades, citing the pianist's clean fingerwork, crisply delineated textures and textual rectitude. Yet these characteristics yielded greater

expressive dividends than I was able to appreciate as a Cortot-smitten youth; the deep listening that Roger Nichols astutely displays in his brilliantly researched and penetrating booklet notes sets one on the right track.

However, I don't quite share Nichols's disdain for Casadesu's compositions (granted, his Flute Sonata isn't a deathless masterpiece, but cut the disarming first movement some slack!), while I'd give Georges Witkowski's variations for piano and orchestra *Mon lac* the benefit of the doubt. As for Casadesu's Fauré and Debussy chamber collaborations, what more can one say about such classic, oft-reissued performances? It's good finally to have this body of recordings together in one place, especially via Mark Obert-Thorn's excellent restorations. **Jed Distler**

'Norma Fisher at the BBC, Vol 2'



Debussy *Études*^a - No 1, Pour les cinq doigts; No 7, Pour les degrés chromatiques; No 11, Pour les arpèges composés **Liszt** *Études d'exécution transcendante*, S139^b - No 4, Mazeppa; No 10, Appassionata. Mephisto Waltz No 1, 'Der Tanz in der Dorfschenke', S514^b. *Venezia e Napoli*, S159^b **Saint-Saëns** Danse macabre, Op 40 (arr Liszt, S555)^c **Schubert** Ständchen, D889 (arr Liszt, S558 No 9)^c **Schumann** Piano Sonata No 2, Op 22^d **A Tchaikowsky** Inventions, Op 2^d

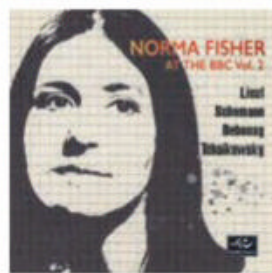
Norma Fisher *pf*

Sonetto Classics ® ② SONCLA004

(115' • ADD/DDD)

Broadcast performances, ^aAugust 15, 1970;

^aFebruary 2, 1979; ^cMarch 1, 1984; ^bMay 24, 1985



Until last spring Norma Fisher was known to me mainly as one of the most

sought-after piano teachers in the world. Then came her historic recordings for the BBC, made before her concert career came to a halt due to focal dystonia in the 1990s and released for the first time by Sonetto Classics (7/18). I was blown away by the humanity and soulfulness of her pianism, and by the sheer love and care that had gone into the process of rediscovery and remastering. The same amount of generosity radiates from the second volume of the series.

If anything, these two discs go even further in revealing her prolific musicianship. The first is an all-Liszt affair, its range covering the enthrallingly demonic First *Mephisto Waltz* to the affectionate transcription of Schubert's 'Hark, hark, the lark'. Beyond sheer

virtuoso display, it's the extraordinary attention to texture that bewitches.

Listen to those rippling cascades in the 'Tarantella' from *Venezia e Napoli*, for instance, and the near-perfection of pedalling in the *Transcendental Studies*. Fisher's rainbow of touch and timbre reminded me of a masterclass I attended, where she asked the student to play a scale with each note having a distinctive colour.

In Schumann's Second Sonata the delirious *va-et-vient* between Florestan and Eusebius is staged in an arena where fluid pacing and expressive intensity are ideally judged. Such is the ease with which Fisher marries passionate spontaneity to control and architecture in the 'as fast as possible' (then faster) opening movement that you wonder why other performances so often misfire. An additional bonus is that she chooses to play Schumann's original finale rather than the published one for this 1984 recording and succeeds in making a strong case for it.

Then there is her poker-faced Debussy *Étude* 'Pour les cinq doigts': as effective as a comedian who never laughs at their own jokes. By Fisher's own account, her lessons with Jacques Février in Paris were particularly revelatory for the French repertoire, including Ravel's *Gaspard*, which she unfortunately never recorded. The slight crackle in the recording of the *Études* only adds to their charm.

There is an abundance of charm, too, alongside wit, sarcasm and even dark intensity, in André Tchaikowsky's *Inventions*. The UK-based, Polish-born composer-pianist was a close friend of Fisher's and encouraged her to prolong her concert career, as she herself fondly remembers. These miniatures each portray a friend (or ex-friend) of the composer, and they are so affectionately rendered that it feels as though Fisher is taking special care not to crack the fragile soul of their creator. She adds to the set an 11th invention, which the composer dropped after falling out with its dedicatee.

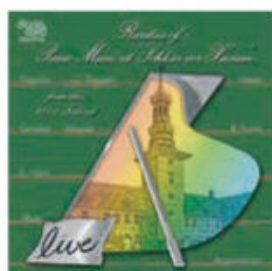
Fisher's recordings for the BBC are far more numerous than these two volumes to date encompass, and Sonetto Classics CEO Tomoyuki Sawado, without whose devotion these gems would have remained buried, is always on the look-out for enthusiasts with any of these recordings in their collections (info@sonettoclassics.com). He will throw his hat in the air if anyone has her complete Scriabin Fifth Sonata – the final bars have been chopped in the only version he has access to. I hear that the next volume may well contain chamber music. Needless to say, I shall be on tenterhooks. **Michelle Assay**



Relaxed insouciance: Andrey Gugin plays Shostakovich with flair and imagination – see review on page 72

'Rarities of Piano Music 2018'

Alkan Nocturne No 4, 'Le grillon', Op 60^{bis}
Arensky Intermezzo, Op 36 No 12^b **Arzumanov**
 27 Pieces, Op 74^c – Before the Exam; Dedication
 to Mahler; Forgotten and Abandoned; To a
 Brighter Future **Debussy** Ballade^d **Desyatnikov**
 From 'Songs from the Bukovina'^c **Dupont**
 La maison dans les dunes^e – No 1, Dans les
 dunes par un clair matin; No 10, Houles **Fuchs**
 Piano Sonata No 1, Op 19 – 4th movt^f **Grovez**
 Fancies – Serenade^g **Hahn** Le rossignol éperdu^c
 – No 31, En caïque; No 51, Adieux au soir tombant
Nicodé Ein Liebesleben, Op 22^h – No 6, Reue;
 No 8, Erinnerung **Piana** La rosa^g **Piazzolla**
 Libertango (arr Piana/Pompa-Baldi)^g
Rachmaninov Vocalise, Op 34 No 14
 (arr Pompa-Baldi)^g **Vierne** Préludes, Op 36ⁱ –
 No 7, Évocation d'un jour d'angoisse; No 12,
 Seul ... **Vladigerov** Passion, Op 9 No 8^a
^h**Simon Callaghan**, ^e**Severin von Eckardstein**,
^c**Lukas Geniušas**, ^a**Etsuko Hirose**, ^b**Sina Klope**,
^f**Ingrid Marsoner**, ^d**Fabian Müller**, ^g**Antonio**
Pompa-Baldi, ⁱ**Muza Rubackyte** *pf*
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 August 18-25, 2018



Not all the 'Great Composers' are excluded from the annual Husum

Festival. But any works by them chosen to be programmed cannot be well known. Hence the opening track on this year's selection from the 2018 week-long series of recitals: Debussy's *Ballade*. Fabian Müller's way with it is intimate and confiding, though his tonal colouring is muted and monochrome compared to Jean-Efflam Bavouzet's liquid rendering on Chandos. The same is true of Ingrid Marsoner, who is heard here in the last movement of Robert Fuchs's sub-Brahmsian Piano Sonata No 1. Her performance is more spirited in its intent than Daniel Blumenthal's 2000 recording for Marco Polo; though, allied to the same limited tonal and dynamic range as Müller's Debussy, several fluffs towards the end betray some technical limitations.

Almost all the remaining 20 items strike me as Husum at its best: pianists whose inquisitiveness has unearthed some gem, the performance of which either leaves you wreathed in smiles or sends you scurrying online to track down the score. Take the Japanese Etsuko Hirose and her beautifully poised playing of 'Passion' (No 8 of *10 Impressions*, Op 9, by the Bulgarian Pancho Vladigerov) and Alkan's atmospheric Nocturne *Le grillon*

('The Cricket'), in which the chirruping of the insect, imitated at the top end of the keyboard, accompanies a simple, lilting melody.

That is followed by two equally haunting numbers from Reynaldo Hahn's collection of 53 short works *Le rossignol éperdu*, played with affection by Lukas Geniušas, as are the five even shorter pieces that succeed them by Valery Arzumanov and Leonid Desyatnikov (the two pieces by the former duplicated from Geniušas's CD of Arzumanov's music – Melodiya, 3/16 – but incomparably better played and recorded here). Without space to comment on all nine pianists, mention must be made of two further Husum returnees: Simon Callaghan, playing two of the numbers included on his recent revelatory Hyperion disc devoted to Nicodé (8/19); and the amazing Antonio Pompa-Baldi, who is heard in Piazzolla's *Libertango* and his own masterly transcription of Rachmaninov's *Vocalise* (though served, I think, with over-liberal lashings of rubato).

The running time is a generous 79'45". Peter Grove returns as booklet writer. Pianophiles should need no further encouragement.

Jeremy Nicholas

George Tsontakis

The American found his own voice by turning to the music that inspired him to compose in the first place, says **Andrew Farach-Colton**

When George Tsontakis was about 15 he tested out a new pair of headphones with a Deutsche Grammophon recording of Stravinsky's *Firebird*. It blew his mind. He had been studying the violin at school on Long Island, New York, since he was seven, but had no idea who Stravinsky was. A few days later, he put on an LP of the Fine Arts Quartet playing Beethoven's Op 135, and that was that. He decided to become a composer. Actually, his first musical love had been Broadway musicals. He took to the stage in school productions and later studied acting at New York University (while also taking violin lessons with the venerable Felix Galamir). He would have made his Broadway debut in *Jesus Christ Superstar*, too, but for a late change of director, and thus a change of casting ideas. Eventually, Tsontakis became a composition student of Roger Sessions, and then went to Europe, where he studied with Donatoni and took an extended seminar with Stockhausen.

It's precisely the large area between tonality and gritty chromaticism that's most interesting to him

Modernism did not sit so well with him, however. In a 2018 interview with the NewMusicBox blog, he says candidly that while he considers a lot of new music to be expertly engineered, he finds it insufficiently communicative, and that even if some works are impressively dramatic, 'there's a difference between drama and empathy'. This gets to the heart of what Tsontakis is about. He never wrote atonal music, he says (and recalls that Sessions used to say that 'atonal' meant music that made no sense), though some of his early works, like his String Quartet No 2 (1983), are quite dissonant. When he found his own voice, he did so by turning back to the music that made him decide to be a composer in the first place.

And, indeed, Beethoven's spirit can be felt in both Tsontakis's Third (1986) and Fourth (1988) Quartets. He even goes so far as to quote Op 135 very briefly in the Third, yet the result is far from pastiche, and thus quite different from, say, the quartets of his elder colleague (and admirer) George Rochberg. One senses Beethoven's influence in the music's muscularity and Tsontakis's delight in obsessively manipulating pithy motifs. Harmonically, the music slips easily between tonality and gritty chromaticism, and the composer has said that it's precisely this large area between the two that's the most interesting to him.

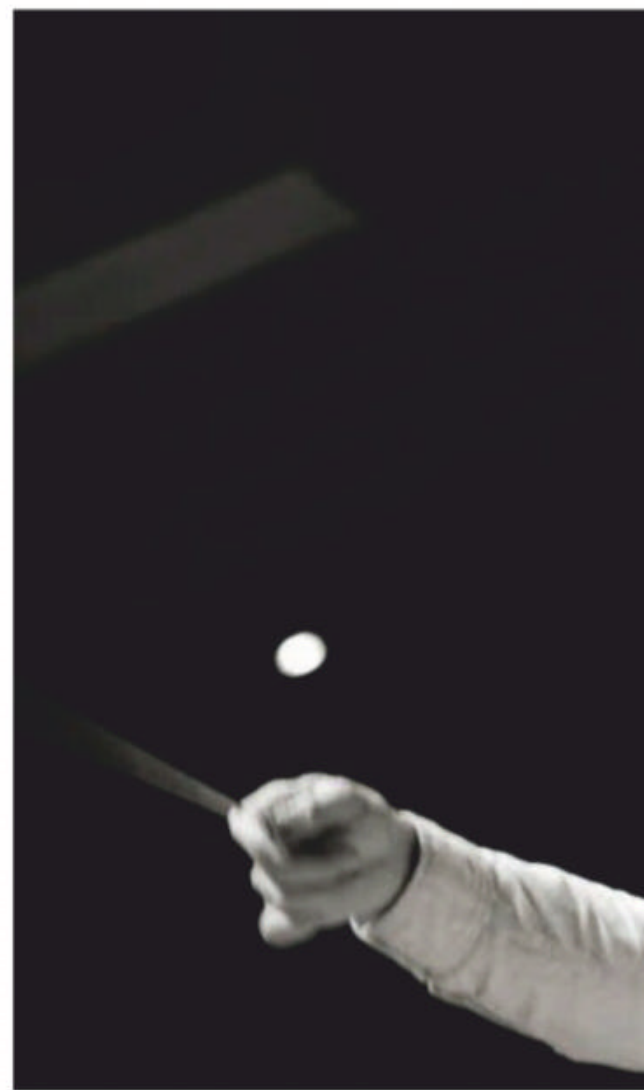
TSONTAKIS FACTS

1951 Born in Astoria, Queens, New York City, on October 24
1974-79 Doctoral studies at Juilliard with Roger Sessions
1976-present Aspen Music Festival composer-in-residence; from 2015, emeritus residency
1979-95 Metropolitan Greek Chorale (NYC) music director
1980-81 Studies in Rome with Franco Donatoni
1991-98 Founding conductor/director of the Aspen Contemporary Ensemble
2003-present Distinguished Composer-in-Residence at Bard College Conservatory of Music
2005 Grawemeyer Award for Violin Concerto No 2
2007 Charles Ives Living Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters
2008-09 Composer-in-residence at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center
2008-12 Albany Symphony composer-in-residence

The Third Quartet is titled *Coraggio*, and the Fourth, *Beneath thy Tenderness of Heart*, a title taken from the Russian hymn that provides the theme for the first movement's variations (or 'meditations', as Tsontakis calls them). The introduction of a hymn is, in itself, another nod to Beethoven, and particularly to his late quartets. Rochberg wrote of the Fourth Quartet, 'Here Tsontakis is not ashamed to be heard praying aloud,' and the work is an early example of what Christopher Rouse has described as 'a profound spiritual impulse' in Tsontakis's music. In a sense, these two quartets hold the seeds of his mature style, including a jocular, cavorting Scherzo in the Fourth that presages some even more imaginative and grandly conceived scherzos in later works. Its driving energy is unmistakably Beethovenian, yet certainly also reflects the composer's Greek heritage. His family is from Crete, and he recalls being taken to concerts of Cretan music by his parents, and the wild dances he heard.

This folk element comes to the fore in the tarantella-like Scherzo (the second of two massive and manic such movements) that concludes the epic *Ghost Variations* (1991), written for Stephen Hough. The pianist has said that the piece pits 'two overriding, opposing psychological elements ... which could be described as obsessiveness versus dissipation, clear-sightedness versus hallucination, firm purpose versus aimlessness'. Yet again, we're in a spiritual realm (as the title itself slyly suggests) – one 'of memory, of dreams', Hough writes; although the tone occasionally turns nightmarish. Brilliantly written for the piano, it's become one of the composer's most frequently performed works.

Tsontakis can be thoughtful in his allusions. A surprise in *Ghost Variations* is a set of variations on a Mozart rondo – what Hough calls 'a play within a play'. And in the *Four Symphonic Quartets* (1992-96), Tsontakis finds his way back to Beethoven via TS Eliot. A symphony in everything but





name, it has four movements that were composed separately and are performable as discrete works, yet were designed to be heard together. His intention here was not to paint a tone poem for each of Eliot's quartets, but rather to take his personal response, manifested in 'subconscious, conjured images', to create 'aural landscapes'. Indeed, there's something almost Sibelian in the way he strides intrepidly through cool and often forbidding expansive vistas he's envisioned. And it's as impressive for its gleaming orchestration as it is for its dramatic punch.

Tsontakis readily admits his influences and inspirations, and from the late 1990s onwards, Messiaen moved high up on that list. One can feel the French composer's presence hovering closely in the *Turangalila*-like harmonies and chirping rhythms of the Second Piano Quartet (1999). Also around this time, a darker side of Tsontakis emerged. In his Violin Concerto No 1 (1998, rev 2002), commissioned by Cho-Liang Lin, anguished lyricism rubs brusquely against caustic references to popular music, including the 1930s tune 'Hooray for Hollywood' and the theme to the US sitcom *I Love Lucy*. There's plenty of heartache also in the lyrical passages that predominate the Second Violin Concerto (2003), but no hint of sarcasm. This work won Tsontakis the Grawemeyer Award in 2005, the same year he completed a piano concerto for Hough, titled *Man of Sorrows*. In this 'tone poem for piano and orchestra', one feels Messiaen's spirit fully integrated with Tsontakis's own – not just in its musical language but also in its overt religious overtones. And, once again, Beethoven takes a role behind the scenes, this time with allusions to Op 135's existential query 'Muss es sein?' and an ecstatic meditation on two chords from the 20th of the *Diabelli* Variations, which Tsontakis says he hears as 'breaths – in, and out – perhaps sad, sorrowing, but essential, human, living'.

Since 1983, Tsontakis has composed only on commission, and thus has ended up specialising in certain genres – which

explains why he's written four piano quartets. He's been particularly in demand for *concertante* works, and that trend shows no sign of abating. First, there was a startlingly mournful percussion concerto for Evelyn Glennie, *Mirologhia* (2001), based on Greek laments. More recently, we've had a double violin concerto, *Unforgettable* (2009, rev 2013), which, like the First Violin Concerto, turns to the pop realm (Nat King Cole's hit song, in this case), though this time with an attitude of bittersweet nostalgia. *Anasa* (2011), written for the clarinetist David Krakauer, is a fragrant mix of klezmer (Krakauer's speciality) and Cretan folk music, while the jazzy syncopations of Tsontakis's trumpet concerto *True Colors* (2012) make it one of the most American-sounding of all his works. His Third Violin Concerto is premiered by soloist Gary Levinson with Robert Spano and the Dallas Symphony Orchestra around the time that this issue of *Gramophone* hits news-stands, and Naxos is soon to release a live recording (2016) of English horn player Robert Sheena and the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Andris Nelsons performing *Sonnets* (2015) – a brooding, darkly rapturous, wordless song-cycle after Shakespeare that significantly expands that instrument's repertory.

Tsontakis is not a self-promoter; he says he's eager to have his work recorded in capable performances, but beyond that he shuns publicity and social media. This is a pity, in a way, as his expertly crafted music deserves a wider hearing. He still acts, appearing with local theatre companies near his home in the Catskill Mountains, a hundred-odd miles north of New York City, but his reticence to be in the spotlight as a composer seems simply to be a part of who he is. Perhaps Hough summed up Tsontakis's art best when he wrote (of *Ghost Variations*): 'The music is new, yet feels as if it's already classic.' **G**

A TASTE OF TSONTAKIS ON RECORD

Nodding to the Classical, the spiritual, the popular and more



String Quartets Nos 3 and 4

American Quartet
New World Records

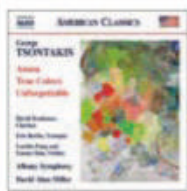
With these craggy, open-hearted quartets, Tsontakis looks lovingly to the past to find his own voice, recapturing, as Kyle Gann puts it, 'the subtlety of classical-era music in an idiom all his own'.



Ghost Variations

Stephen Hough *pf*
Hyperion (8/98)

There's an abundance of cleverness and wit in *Ghost Variations*, but the music is dead serious. Hough revels in the dazzlingly imaginative piano writing while zeroing in on its spiritual core.



Anasa. True Colors. Unforgettable

David Krakauer *cl* Eric Berlin *tpt* Luosha Fang, Eunice Kim *vns*
Albany Symphony / David Alan Miller
Naxos (A/17)

These recent concertos demonstrate Tsontakis's remarkable ability to absorb and transform sources as disparate as klezmer and popular song. Conductor Miller is one of the composer's most ardent champions.

Many of the composer's early works, including the magnificent *Four Symphonic Quartets*, were issued on the now-defunct Koch label and are well worth hunting down.

Vocal



Peter Quantrill enjoys a Japanese album from the SWR Vokalensemble:
'Takemitsu is represented by a trio of saccharine songs – but then Japanese sweets make a virtue of cloying sweetness' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 87**



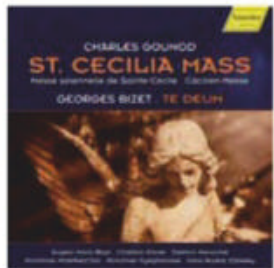
Andrew Mellor surveys some recent discs of Norwegian music:
'Norway is in the midst of a fresh and multifaceted examination of its own musical traditions' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 90**

Bizet • Gounod

Bizet *Te Deum* **Gounod** *Messe solennelle de Sainte Cécile*

Angela Maria Blasi *sop* **Christian Elsner** *ten*
Dietrich Henschel *bar* **Munich Motet Choir;**
Munich Symphony Orchestra /
Hans Rudolf Zöbeley

Hänssler Classic ⑤ HC19046 (60' • DDD • T)
Recorded live at the Herkulesaal, Munich,
March 13 & 17, 1996
From Profil PH05028



Recorded as long ago as 1996, this reissue makes catalogue sense: a double-up of sacred

works by major 19th-century French composers later better known for their work in the opera house. Gounod and Bizet had several other links. They were both encouraged to set religious texts by time spent in the Italian capital as winners of the Prix de Rome and they became good friends after Gounod took over occasionally as Bizet's principal teacher.

In their quest to develop their compositional styles both men sought a lighter, less formal and more theatrical method of approaching these standard-repertoire Latin texts than had hitherto been the norm. It may seem corny and old news to us now, accustomed as we are to contemporary settings of the liturgy influenced by rock and musicals (like Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Requiem* or Bernstein's *Mass*). But an astute contemporary, Camille Saint-Saëns, was genuinely excited after the Gounod work's 1855 Paris premiere: 'The appearance of the *Messe Sainte Cécile* caused a kind of shock. This simplicity, this grandeur, this serene light which rose before the musical world like a breaking dawn, troubled people enormously ... at first one was dazzled, then charmed, then conquered.' To this informed observer the setting was radical; he even believed that Gounod's operas would be long forgotten while his oratorios still ruled church and concert.

Having obeyed (more or less) expectations about weight and colour up until the end of the *Credo* – whose big tune was once compared in *Gramophone* to a hit Beatles song – Gounod goes his own way thereafter. The present performance omits the orchestra-alone *Offertory* (why?) and three choral salutations of Emperor Napoleon III, a period equivalent of the 'Vivats' in our Coronation service. Then the remaining sections strike a lighter, freer vein of accompaniment, including an attractive tenor solo in the *Sanctus* (shades of Berlioz's own *Grande Messe des morts*, perhaps). Although decently sung by the three soloists and led by a conductor who has spent a lifetime in this repertoire, the performance, in a live but clear recording, remains less collectable than the older Jean-Claude Hartemann (Warner, more characterful soloists) or the Mariss Jansons (BR-Klassik, better choir).

The Bizet score fires into life with a surprising, even mildly shocking march setting of the *Te Deum*'s opening paragraphs and goes for broke at the end with another unpredictably up-tempo treatment of the final 'Fiat misericordia tua'. The score is more grippingly projected with a surplus of unembarrassed enthusiasm in Jean-Claude Casadesus's 2010 Lille recording (Naxos).

Although neither piece finds the composers yet at their best, they are diverting way stations to listen to, the Gounod certainly pre-echoing the storytelling colours of his *Faust* to come.

Mike Ashman

Gounod – selected comparisons:

Hartemann (7/64^R, 10/18) (WARN) 9029 56488-7

Jansons (BRKL) 900114

Bizet – selected comparison:

J-C Casadesus (2/11) (NAXO) 8 572270

Charlton

The Cloud^a. *Fantasy*^b. *Gaudete! Gaudete!*
Christus est natus^c. *The Snow in the Street*^c.
Suite for Cello and Guitar^d

^aApril Fredrick *sop* ^aWilliam Vann *pf*

^bAlan Charlton *electronic pf* ^cBrussels Chamber
Choir / Helen Cassano; ^dEdenwood Duo
Etcetera ⑤ KTC1662 (75' • DDD • T)



Composer,
performer,
educator – Alan
Charlton (1970-

2018) packed a great deal into his all-too-brief life, and this release (mostly recorded over the months prior to his death) provides a welcome selection of his later work. Most substantial is the song-cycle *The Cloud* (2015), its six sections each featuring a stanza of Shelley's eponymous poem – a typical mixture of the inspired and contrived to which Charlton responds with music of finely wrought eloquence but also some prolixity, exacerbated by repetition of words and phrases to overly rhetorical effect. Not that this fazes April Fredrick, whose vocal assurance goes a long way towards sustaining the half-hour whole, throughout which she is ably supported by William Vann.

Charlton was an enthusiastic choral singer, reflected in the pieces included here. *The Snow in the Street* (2011) sets William Morris's nativity poem with affecting emphasis on those solo voices depicting the shepherds, whereas *Gaudete!* (2014) offers an incisive reappraisal of this familiar text. The *Suite for cello and guitar* (2005) is striking for the ways in which Charlton combines the instruments so timbre and texture converge in numerous and intriguing ways – not least the engaging 'Tarantella' and soulful 'Cantilena'. *Fantasy* (2011) is an amalgam of technological and harmonic innovation over an ingenious and resourceful three-part sequence.

The performances underline the respect in which Charlton and his music are held, the various acoustics skilfully managed and the annotations commendably detailed (further information at alancharlton.com). As an overview of a distinctive talent, this is worth investigating.

Richard Whitehouse



Rich vocal colour: baritone Konstantin Krimmel and pianist Doriana Tchakarova bring an emotional immediacy to German ballads – see review on page 91

Dvořák • Janáček • Smetana

Dvořák Biblical Songs, Op 99 B185^a

Janáček The Diary of One Who Disappeared^b

Smetana Evening Songs^c

Vilém Přibyl *ten*^b Libuše Márová *mez*

^aMilan Máša, ^bJosef Páleníček *pfs*

^bKühn Mixed Chorus / Pavel Kühn

Supraphon © SU4269-2 (70' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded ^c1971, ^a1972, ^b1977; ^bfrom 1112 2414 (8/80)



Only months after Nicky Spence's superb new recording of Janáček's haunting song-cycle (Hyperion, 8/19), here comes another account of *The Diary of One who Disappeared*. It's not new – the album features recordings made between 1971 and 1977 – but marks the return to the catalogue of a performance of moving honesty and sincerity by Vilém Přibyl, longtime member of the Brno Opera ensemble and one of the finest Czech tenors of the post-war period. It's a reissue that fills a gap in the discography as an important homegrown complement to Beno Blachut's earlier Supraphon account (3/59).

Přibyl's voice is superbly secure and characterful – and often very beautiful in its distinctive colour. The interpretation has a

naturalness and dignity that's different from the more expressionistic approach of recent British tenors, but is no less effective. Libuše Márová is a characterful mezzo soloist and Josef Páleníček's piano-playing is vivid and poetic, although quite understated in the *Intermezzo erotico* by the modern standard set by Thomas Adès (with Bostridge – EMI/Warner, 10/02) and Julius Drake (with Spence). It's a shame that otherwise admirably natural engineering gives the piano a slightly artificial sound, but one soon adjusts.

No Janáček fan will want to be without this in their collection, and the excellent couplings only heighten the appeal: a wonderfully noble account of Dvořák's *Biblical Songs* and a touching performance of Smetana's *Five Evening Songs*, a collection notably badly served in the catalogue.

A very welcome reissue. **Hugo Shirley**

Grieg

'Lyric Music'

Haugtussa, Op 67^a. The Ambitious One, Op 26 No 3^a. Farewell, Op 59 No 5^a. I love but thee, Op 5 No 3^a. On the Water, Op 60 No 3^a. The Princess^a. Six Songs, Op 25^a – No 3, Album Lines; No 4, With a Waterlily. Six Songs, Op 39^a – No 2, Hidden Love; No 5, At the Grave of a Young Wife. The White and the Red Rose^a. Lyric Pieces: Op 12 – No 1, Arietta; No 5, Folk Song; No 6, Norwegian;

Butterfly, Op 43 No 1; Melody, Op 47 No 3; Bellringing, Op 54 No 6; Vanished Days, Op 57 No 1; Op 62 – No 1, Sylph; No 5, Phantom; No 6, Homeward

^aClaire Booth *sop* Christopher Glynn *pf*

Avie © AV2403 (72' • DDD • T/t)



As with September's Recording of the Month (from the pianist Denis

Kozhukhin), Grieg's *Lyric Pieces* are once more brought out of their turn-of-the-19th-century cupboard to share a recital programme, this time with Grieg himself as song-writer. According to a note by the performers themselves, this strong and rare idea was suggested by research into Grieg's own recital programmes on tour with his soprano wife Nina Hagerup. Those concerts were noted for a lively presentation which nicely upset the otherwise rather sacred atmosphere of such events at the time, especially in Britain.

Booth and Glynn are certainly on fire here. The solo piano items tell a real story – Grieg's very own 'Lieder ohne Worte'. It's a bonus for gramophone collectors if you compare the result with the still special Emil Gilels DG selection

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Diana Adamyan
Francesca Dego
Viviane Hagner
Henning Kraggerud
Anthony Marwood
Nathan Meltzer
Hyeyoon Park
Callum Smart

CELLO

Alexander Chaushian
Marie-Elisabeth Hecker
Laura van der Heijden

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Julian Bream

TRUMPET

Matilda Lloyd

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Brodsky Quartet

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The Gesualdo Six
Polyphony
Roomful of Teeth
The Tallis Scholars

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Tafelmusik
Vox Luminis

CONTEMPORARY

Bang on a Can
Eighth Blackbird

COMPOSER

Henning Kraggerud
Olli Mustonen
(IN ASSOC. WITH SCHOTT MUSIC)
Owain Park
(IN ASSOC. WITH NOVELLO)

ACCOMPANISTS

Sholto Kynoch
Anna Tilbrook

STAGE DIRECTORS

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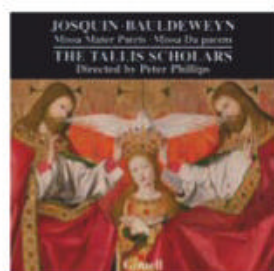
or the recordings by Leif Ove Andsnes (EMI/Warner, 4/02). These tend to emphasise the serious classical, Leipzig-trained formality of the music as opposed to the storytelling pictures and echoes of folk-like leanings. Whereas the *Lyric Pieces* chosen and performed here stand up clearly as miniature symphonic poems – and you’re positively anticipating Booth to be joining in at any moment to amplify Glynn’s solo numbers. Moreover, their selection of songs, with its dips into the higher poetry of Grieg’s two contemporaries – playwrights Bjørnson (‘The White and the Red Rose’, ‘The Princess’) and Ibsen (‘With a Waterlily’, ‘Album Lines’), both sometime collaborators of his – complements and ups the ante on the more everyday tales of nature and frustrated love.

In this context the placing of the cycle *Haugtussa* in the middle of the programme is inspired. Booth here goes all out – not unlike Katerina Karnéus before her (Hyperion, 10/08) – to capture the yearnings and frustrations of the shepherd girl with a truly contemporary lack of inhibition. The historic performances by Kirsten Flagstad (Decca, Naxos) sound emotionally prim in comparison, an effect emphasised by the then habitual placing of the singer so far forwards. Like Anne Sofie von Otter’s DG performance (6/93), the engineering places Booth in the middle of her accompaniment. Such a performance and balance helps to push the still undervalued dramatic status of *Haugtussa* across any language barrier – and Booth also enjoys detail like the spiky sounds in the comic, and often cheeky, names of the girl’s goats in ‘The Kid’s Dance’.

This new recital, strongly recommended, contributes greatly to the catalogues as a kind of heightened guide both to Grieg’s song-writing and the still unsuspected range of his *Lyric Pieces*. **Mike Ashman**

Josquin Desprez • Bauldeweyn • Brumel

Bauldeweyn *Missa Da pacem* Brumel *Mater Patris* Josquin Desprez *Missa Mater Patris*
The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips
Gimell © CDGIM052 (72’ • DDD • T/t)



As one of the most important accounts of Josquin’s Masses in recent decades, Peter Phillips’s albums with The Tallis Scholars continue to sparkle and inform. Already in these pages I have admired the clarity of vision and consistency of sound that this ensemble bring to his works; but with this

new album there is a particular sheen to the performance that places it among their recent best.

Phillips recently wrote how he feels each of Josquin’s Masses has its own ‘sound world’ (*The Musical Times*, autumn 2018). As we approach the end of his recording project, this comment comes into sharper focus, and particularly so in the case of *Missa Mater Patris*. One can argue that this is a late work on the grounds it is potentially a lament for Brumel, who died around 1512 and whose motet provides the model. But also, as Phillips suggests, this ‘forthright’ and ‘bracingly simple’ style could be the refinement of a lifetime’s work. One could say that of this performance as well: it is scored for low voices and these singers find a warmth in the homophonic writing that blooms into an unhurried grandeur. Compared with Chanticleer (7/94) this is a much tighter ensemble in both tone and phrasing, and there are several outstandingly well-controlled spans of two-voice polyphony. Listen especially for the way these singers glide through the exotic chord-chains in the *Sanctus*: I can’t help but be reminded of the confident sweep of the Andrews Sisters. This is glorious stuff indeed.

Missa Da pacem was once thought to be by Josquin and recorded on LP as such several times in the early ’70s, until it was shown to be by the little-known Noel Bauldeweyn (fl1509-13). Phillips includes it in his cycle as an exercise in tracing Josquin’s influence. It’s worth it for its especially beautiful *Agnus Dei III*, which is sung here with charm and tenderness. **Edward Breen**

Liszt

Three Petrarch Sonnets – S161 Nos 4-6; S270a^a; S270b^a. Oh! Quand je dors, S282^a

^aAndré Schuen bar Daniel Heide pf

AVI-Music © AVI8553472 (65 • DDD • T)



This recital marks the start of a new survey of Liszt’s complete songs from the Weimar-based pianist Daniel Heide. With the baritone André Schuen, he tackles all three versions of the *Petrarch Sonnets*, flanking the piano transcriptions from *Années de pèlerinage* with the two vocal sets, completed in 1846 and 1882 respectively. The Hugo setting ‘Oh! Quand je dors’, also evoking Petrarch’s love for Laura, is far more than just a filler in this context.

To my knowledge, this is the first time that all three Petrarch cycles have been placed side by side on disc, and the

differences are instructive. The piano version, begun almost immediately after the first vocal set was complete, is effectively a straightforward transcription of the songs, though the austere, fragmented 1882 set differs so substantially from its predecessor as to constitute a separate work, albeit deploying the same thematic material and substantially the same texts.

Schuen’s dark, at times almost gritty tone and pungent, declamatory way with words suit the later version down to the ground. Emotions bite. The text is vividly delivered. ‘Pace non trovo’ is a real eruption of frustration and anger. But Schuen can sweeten the sound into a beautiful *mezza voce*, heard to wonderful effect at the end of ‘I’ vidi in terra’, where his voice floats upwards as ‘celestial harmony’ briefly stills the natural world around him.

Many of the same qualities inform his performance of the 1846 set. Originally written for tenor, this has become the standard version for many singers, albeit in transposition, and Schuen is by no means the first baritone to tackle it. There are a couple of moments of effort, and you may prefer the warmer tone of, say, Dmitri Hvorostovsky (Ondine, 12/15) here, but there are also some marvellous things: long, quiet lines that flow with consummate ease, and a tremendous surge of emotion at ‘chiamando il nome di mia Laura’ in ‘Benedetto sia’l giorno’ that knocks you sideways. ‘Oh! Quand je dors’, meanwhile, is almost operatic in its intensity, that *mezza voce* speaking volumes at the end yet again.

Heide, meanwhile, is a fine Liszt accompanist, always knowing when to assert himself and when to pull back and let the vocal line do the work. He very much comes into his own in the piano set, fully surmounting its technical challenges and playing with rapt introversion throughout. The booklet notes, Heide’s own, make fascinating reading but don’t provide anything like the scholarly apparatus of Hyperion’s Liszt series. No translations are given, and the texts come in their original versions, with no indication given of the variants Liszt deploys. But it’s a fine start to what will hopefully be a fine series, and I look forward with pleasure to its further instalments. **Tim Ashley**

Palestrina

‘Vol 8’

Missa Fratres ego enim accepi. Song of Songs – Nos 25-27. Accepit Jesus calicem. Caro mea vere est cibus. Ego sum panis vivus. Fratres ego enim accepi. Pange lingua. Pater noster. Sacerdotes Domini. Victimae paschali laudes

GRAMOPHONE *Focus*

HANDELIAN RICHES

Richard Wigmore enjoys two outstanding accounts of Handel's *Brookes Passion*, which should elevate this neglected work's status



Richard Egarr and the Academy of Ancient Music offer a dramatic account of Handel's *Brookes Passion*

Handel

Brookes Passion, HWV48

Ruby Hughes, Elizabeth Watts *sops* **Rachael Lloyd** *alto* **Tim Mead** *counterten* **Gwilym Bowen, Robert Murray, Nicky Spence** *tens* **Cody Quattlebaum** *bass-bar* **Morgan Pearse** *bass*
Choir and Orchestra of the Academy of Ancient Music / Richard Egarr
 AAM Records ⑤ ③ AAM007 (173' • DDD • T/t)

Handel

Brookes Passion, HWV48

Maria Keohane, Joanne Lunn, Hanna Zumsande *sops* **Daniel Carlsson, Daniel Elgersma** *countertens* **Ed Lyon, Gwilym Bowen** *tens*
Peter Harvey, Jakob Bloch Jespersen *basses*
Concerto Copenhagen / Lars Ulrik Mortensen
 CPO ⑤ ② CPO555 286-2 (152' • DDD • T/t)



'In the *Brookes Passion* Handel comes nearest to challenging Bach, and retires discomfited', was Winton Dean's withering verdict in his classic *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques* (OUP: 1959). Other commentators have been equally tepid. Move forward some 60 years and Richard Egarr, in the lavish documentation to his new recording,

ranks Handel's *Passion* oratorio above *Messiah*. The Handel scholar Ruth Smith reckons *Brookes's* text, with its luridly graphic imagery, more dramatic than either of the Bach *Passions*. Both claims might seem questionable. Yet the earlier parts of this poetic paraphrase of the *Passion* story, devoted to Christ's agony in the garden, Judas's betrayal and Peter's remorse, do indeed give rich scope to Handel's gifts for drama and acute human characterisation. The portrayal of Peter, in particular, has an almost shocking immediacy. Handel's pithy *turba* choruses are less elaborately developed than Bach's but barely less powerful. The pace does, though, slacken dangerously in the latter part of the work, essentially a series of meditations on the meaning of Christ's sacrifice for the allegorical figures of the *Daughter of Zion* and *A Faithful Soul*.

What is irrefutable is the high quality of the music in this neglected outlier among Handel's major works, some of it fruitfully plundered for *Esther*, *Acis and Galatea*, *Deborah* and *Athalia*. Even when one reflective soprano aria succeeds another towards the end, Handel's powers of melodic invention usually carry the day. Although the *Passion's* origins are obscure, it seems to have been written round 1716 to a commission from Germany. The first performance we know of – not necessarily the premiere, as confidently stated in the

booklet – was in Hamburg in April 1719. Three hundred years on, Richard Egarr and the AAM gave an enthusiastically received performance at the Barbican using a new edition by the orchestra's oboist Leo Duarte, followed by recording sessions in London's Henry Wood Hall.

From the French-style opening tableau, the only extended chorus in the work, Egarr and his responsive forces hardly put a foot wrong. The superb playing and singing of the AAM go beyond mere notions of good Handelian style, while all the soloists 'live' their roles with operatic vividness. The words – overly sentimental or brutal for modern taste – always matter. In the *Daughter of Zion's* 14 solos (or have I lost count?) Elizabeth Watts sings with fervent intensity, the brightness of her tone tempered by a warm mezzo glint. Highlights among her arias are legion. I would just pick out the sublime 'Die ihr Gottes Gnad' after Judas's suicide, voice and oboe vying with each other in grieving eloquence, and her no-holds-barred attack in the violent 'Schäumst du, du Schaum der Welt' as she rails against Christ's mockery by the Jews.

Cody Quattlebaum makes a noble, gravely sonorous Jesus, here a more vulnerably human figure than in the Bach *Passions*. He has some of the most affecting music in the work, including a poignant duet with Mary, movingly sung by Quattlebaum and Watts. Of the three tenor soloists, Robert Murray is a clear, sympathetic Evangelist, Gwilym Bowen an intensely dramatic Peter, whether in his splenetic outburst at Judas's betrayal ('Gift und Glut') or his own self-lacerating remorse ('Heul, du Schaum!'), with its grinding clashes between voice and oboe. Toby Spence deploys his heroic Wagnerian tones to thrilling effect in 'Erwäg, grimmiger Natternbrut', egged on by spitting, jaggling violins. The pure-voiced Ruby Hughes also makes her mark as *A Faithful Soul*, not least in the assuaging minuet aria 'Was Wunder, dass der Sonnen Pracht', warmly coloured by bassoons. Handel, who always knew when he was on to a good thing, drew on this aria a couple of years later in *Galatea's* 'As when the dove'.

On the face of it, it might seem unlucky that CPO has released its *Brookes Passion* in the same month as the AAM's superb recording, whose scholarly, sumptuously illustrated booklet runs to over 200 pages. There are minor differences in the musical text used, most obviously in the opening *Symphonia*, where Egarr prefaces the

fugue with a triple-time *Vivace* (Handel recycled both these movements in his Concerto grosso Op 3 No 2). Not surprisingly, CPO's presentation doesn't stand a chance against the AAM's. Musically, though, this finely recorded performance, more intimate in scale than Egarr's (with the choral numbers sung by the soloists), hardly suffers from the comparison.

Lars Ulrik Mortensen gets eager, alert playing from his trim band, while his solo team is uniformly strong. Of the three fresh-toned sopranos who share the role of the Daughter of Zion, I'd single out Joanne Lunn for her limpid grace and touching personal expressiveness, both in aria and recitative. Ed Lyon is at least Murray's match as the Evangelist, varying his pacing in keeping with the rather more reflective conception of the whole performance. Peter Harvey is a sympathetic Jesus, lighter and more tenorish of tone than Cody Quattlebaum for Egarr, while Gwilym Bowen – who must have spent large chunks of 2019 singing Peter – is just as anguished and incisive as on the AAM recording. Occasionally Mortensen's broader tempos struck me as more apt, especially in the five chorales that Dean and others have unfavourably compared to Bach's. Whereas Egarr, typically, goes for urgency, Mortensen allows you to savour the beauty of the string suspensions in the first chorale. Against that, Egarr and his singers are altogether more gripping in the tense dialogue between the Daughter of Zion and the Faithful Souls 'Eilt, ihr angefocht'ne Seelen', the model for Bach's setting of the same text in the *St John Passion*.

If I plump, just, for Egarr and the AAM, it's because their performance is that much more dramatic and, on the whole, even better sung. The luxury presentation, including a 'bonus' disc offering alternative versions of several numbers, may sway it for some collectors. But no Handel lover who buys the excellent Mortensen recording will feel short-changed. Reviewing the first-ever recording of the *Brookes Passion*, from August Wenzinger (Archiv, 4/68), with a slightly bowdlerised text, Stanley Sadie suggested that 'had Bach's *St John* and *St Matthew Passions* never existed, I think we would find Handel's *Brookes Passion* a satisfying piece to listen to each Easter'. On this evidence I'd put it more strongly than that. Happily, there is a place for all three. **G**

The Sixteen / Harry Christophers

Coro © COR16175 (73' • DDD • T/t)



The liturgical moment of the Eucharist dominates this new helping of Palestrina (much of it for eight voices): it accounts for most of the motets presented here. They are all beautifully poised; the most pleasing is perhaps *Caro mea vere est cibus*. But the disc's centrepiece is once again a Mass, based on another Eucharistic motet, *Fratres ego enim accepi*. It's most elegant, and surprising therefore that it hasn't been recorded more often: given the number of voices involved, it is striking how uncluttered and economical are the results. If my review of the previous instalment a couple of years ago (11/17) read rather diffidently, the quality of the music here is more immediately obvious.

After 10 hours of Palestrina, and as the series appears to draw to a close, it's possible to wish for more variety of tone. The Sixteen inflect their basic approach with considerable subtlety and skill (try the end of the *Gloria* and *Credo*, and especially the hymn *Victimae paschali laudes* – a surprising exception is towards the end of that hymn, when the switch to triple time is rather overdone). But in the end, their view of this much-revered composer is not as varied as his output demonstrates. Arguably, this is more a matter of programming than of interpretation. In my review of the very first volume I'd hoped that they might explore some of the cycles based on madrigals, for example; and although Harry Christophers's selection has indeed revealed a few Masses that are heard less often (such as this one), there's little to force his ensemble out of its comfort zone: most of the Masses in the series are based on his own motets. Whether or not this is a missed opportunity depends on one's point of view; having said which, this strikes me as one of the best volumes of the series, as much for the performances as for the music.

Fabrice Fitch

Peñalosa • Escobar • Guerrero

Escobar Stabat mater dolorosa Guerrero Antes que comáis a Dios. Quae est ista Peñalosa Lamentations. Missa L'homme armé - Gloria; Credo; Agnus Dei. Sancta Maria, succurre miseris. Unica est columba mea New York Polyphony

BIS © BIS2407 (57' • DDD/DSO • T/t)



It's wonderful to hear more music from Francisco de Peñalosa (1470-1528), and particularly pleasing that it comes on this stylish release from New York Polyphony complete with superb booklet notes by Ivan Moody. Peñalosa's life coincided with the beginning of the Spanish 'Golden Age' and he was a key figure in the generation before Cristóbal de Morales (1500-53). A useful elevator pitch would be 'Flemish polyphony with a twist'.

The programme features two substantial settings of *Lamentations* unique to manuscripts from Tarazona Cathedral. Of these, the *Lamentationes Jeremiae Feria VI* (Holy Friday) are the more immediately striking – the letters in particular: 'Beth', sung here with slightly wet final consonants, then a sumptuous 'Ghmel' showcase the singers' unhurried and impassioned tone to the full. The programme also includes Peñalosa's *Missa L'homme armé* interlaced with a pair of his motets and two from Francisco Guerrero (1528-99). Comparing Peñalosa's *Sancta Maria, succurre miseris* to the direct and imploring performance by Gothic Voices (Hyperion, 2/94) highlights New York Polyphony's richer, imploring tone but also the warmly resonant space of Princeton Abbey, where they allow more space between phrases until the final triple-time section inspires a little flurry. The effect is stunning.

Two standout pieces are the *Stabat mater* by Pedro de Escobar (fl1507-14), a short but arresting setting of the first two verses. Rich and vibrant in texture, it again draws on this ensemble's deep palette of vocal colours. The second is the *Credo* from *Missa L'homme armé*, which sits like a declamatory jewel in the middle of this disc. Previously known only by The Orlando Consort's brighter, sparkling performance (Harmonia Mundi), it is here taken slightly slower and with more gravitas. However, with only six surviving cyclic Masses by Peñalosa, not all of which are yet represented on disc, my gripe is that this *Missa L'homme armé* is incomplete, lacking its five-voice *Kyrie* and the *Sanctus/Benedictus*. While not musically problematic, it is something of a shame not to have the opportunity to hear the whole thing, especially considering the quality and beauty of performance in the other movements. **Edward Breen**

Smyth

Mass in D^a. The Wreckers – Overture

^a**Susanna Hurrell** *sop* ^a**Catriona Morison** *mez* ^a**Ben**

Johnson *ten* ^a**Duncan Rock** *bar* **BBC Symphony**

Chorus and Orchestra / Sakari Oramo

Chandos   CHSA5240 (71' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



When John Steane reviewed Philip Brunelle's Virgin Classics recording of Ethel Smyth's Mass in D (1891, rev 1925) in August 1991, 100 years after its composition, he noted that its composer was one 'whose name everybody knows and whose music nobody has heard'. He believed Brunelle's recording (sadly nla) would 'do something to remedy that, in fact a very considerable something', though in the event I believe it helped reinforce Smyth's name rather than foster a wider appreciation of her music. It was the coupling of her suffragette anthem, *The March of the Women*, that received air-time.

The Mass is by far the deeper, grander work, full of extraordinary music and, as Steane noted, considered by some to be her masterpiece. It is a remarkable, individualistic work, looking Janus-faced back to Bach and Beethoven, and forwards to Bax and Brian. This excellent new recording is the third the Mass has received that I know of (the other is a German performance on Audite). Oramo's pacing is fairly swift, especially in the *Kyrie*, but never hurried. The larger forces of the BBC Symphony Chorus and Orchestra give the music greater heft, too, paying dividends in Chandos's warmer, richer sound. Oramo's soloists are also marginally superior, even if I still prefer Eiddwen Harrhy's tone to Susanna Hurrell's.

Oramo's account of the Overture to *The Wreckers* is well groomed but fairly driven. Although close in duration to those of Alexander Gibson (reissued under Warner's Classics for Pleasure imprint) and Odaline de la Martinez – in her recording of the full opera (nla) – the fast music is taken at an exhilarating lick only for the brakes to be slammed on in the lyrical second subject. The competition are more natural but there's no denying the excitement Oramo generates with the BBC Symphony Orchestra. **Guy Rickards**

Weir

Airs from Another Planet. The Bagpiper's String Trio. Three Chorales. Day Break Shadows Flee. Nuits d'Afrique. O viridissima. Really?

Ailish Tynan *sop* **Hebrides Ensemble**

Delphian   DCD34228 (73' • DDD • T/t)



From the start of *Nuits d'Afrique*, the flute weaves its sensuous lines around the

soprano voice and echoes of Ravel's *Chansons Madécasses* hang in the air. It turns out this is not a coincidence, as Judith Weir wrote her hypnotically beautiful song-cycle in 2015 to stand alongside the Ravel in a recital at London's Wigmore Hall. She has done an expert job, conjuring an exotic locale every bit as Impressionist and alluring as Ravel's in her four settings of contemporary African women poets. (One wry poem about a vegetarian crocodile could just as happily have slotted into his *Histoires naturelles*.) Ailish Tynan, the singer at the premiere, and flute, cello and piano from the Hebrides Ensemble have been rewarded with one of the most enjoyable song-cycles of recent years.

The title of the disc, 'Airs from Another Planet', refers to the last of the seven works included here. A sextet dating back to 1986, this is a fantastical early work that imagines a group of prospective Mars colonists marooned in preparation on a remote Scottish island for generations, during which time their memories of traditional airs have faded, leaving a series of brilliant short pieces for wind with only a slight Scottish tang. As well as *Nuits d'Afrique*, there are three other first recordings: the hymn-like *O viridissima* for piano, violin and cello (2015), derived from Hildegard of Bingen; the inventive piano solo *Day Break Shadows Flee* (2014), first played by Benjamin Grosvenor at a lunchtime BBC Prom; and another short song-cycle, *Really?* (2012), vividly performed by Tynan, which contrasts three types of word-setting: spoken, *Sprechstimme* and fully sung. I am not sure how often I would want to hear this cycle, intriguing though the idea is. All the other pieces on the disc are vintage Weir, so economical in their acuity, and sparkingly performed. **Richard Fairman**

'17th Century Playlist'

Boësset Je voudrais bien, ô Cloris **Cavalli**

Eliogabalo – Misero, così va **Dowland** My thoughts are wing'd with hopes. Time stands still **Fontana** Sonatas – No 8; No 17 **Guédron** Aux plaisirs, aux délices, bergères **Lambert** Vos mespris chaque jour **Landi** Augellin che 'l tuo amor. Canta la cicaletta. Damigella tutta bella. Passacaglia della vita **Lanier** Love's Constancy (No more shall meads) **Le Camus** Je veux me plaindre **Moulinié** O stelle homicide

Ed Lyon *ten* **Theatre of the Ayre**

Delphian   DCD34220 (62' • DDD • T/t)



It's a lovely concept – an album of the 17th century's greatest hits, where only the

catchiest, most irrepressibly infectious dances and the swooniest ballads need apply. This isn't about big names (though there are plenty here, Cavalli and Landi representing Italy, Dowland and Lanier from England, with Lambert serving up lashings of French languor) but tunes that just hit the spot, the three-minute Eurovision pop songs of their day.

Tenor Ed Lyon has gathered together the starriest of backing groups for his solo debut. Elizabeth Kenny is both lead guitar and rhythm section, roaming seamlessly on to both lute and theorbo, with support from Siobhan Armstrong's sweet-toned triple harp, Reiko Ichise on gamba and violinists Rodolfo Richter and Jane Gordon.

There's a real sense of musical camaraderie here – of spontaneous conversations and mutual enjoyment of skill. The freedom many of the ground basses allow for improvisation is taken up enthusiastically, and period style is treated (by both the instrumentalists and Lyon himself) with just the right amount of playful, irreverent freedom. Hints of bluegrass creep into the attractive Sonata No 17 by Fontana, spiced, Spanish-style colours into Landi's impossibly catchy *Passacaglia della vita* – a tango *avant la lettre*.

Lyon has put together a wonderfully wide-ranging programme but it's the French repertoire where he really shines. Boësset's *Je voudrais bien Chloris* has just the right amount of morning-after sensuality in the lazy ornaments and gentle rhythmic push and pull of the phrasing, while Lambert's exquisite *Vos mespris chaque jour* is all rueful beauty, teasing suspensions and trills from pain into reluctant pleasure.

There's plenty of energy and attack in the Italian dances by Landi, drama crackling from Lyon's crisp diction, and the opening Cavalli ('Misero, così va' from *Eliogabalo*) glances in through the window of the opera house for unrequited love at heightened, theatrical pitch. Strangely it's the English repertoire where this recording is at its weakest. Lyon's muscular voice feels blanched and confined by the modest melodic dimensions of Dowland's 'Time stands still' and Lanier's 'Love's Constancy' – songs that bloom freely and with greater colour for so many smaller voices. But it's a small gripe in an otherwise superb set. **Alexandra Coghlan**



Photo : © Marco Borggreve

stile antico

A Spanish Nativity

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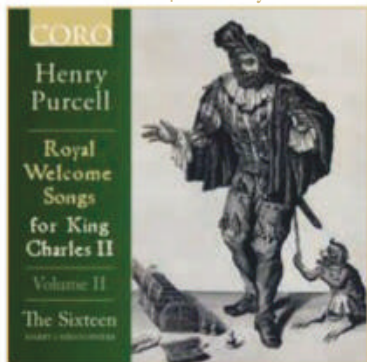


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Palestrina Volume 8

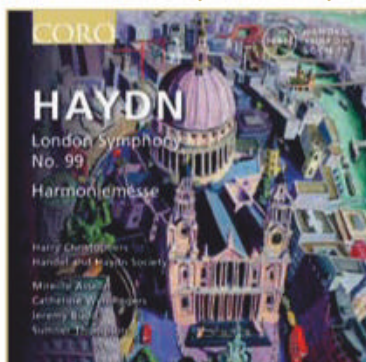
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Palestrina was undisputedly one of the most famous composers of his age and his legacy has lasted to this day. The eighth recording in The Sixteen's celebrated series focuses on the Last Supper and the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross at the first Easter. It includes the *Missa Fratres ego enim accepi* and three settings from the *Song of Songs*.

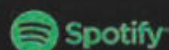
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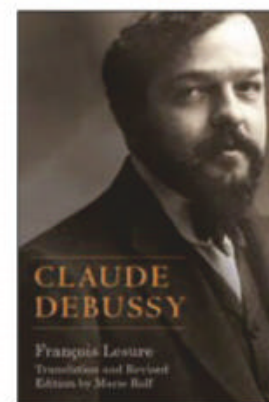
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This third instalment in Capella de la Torre's series of the four elements is every bit as

fresh and thoughtful as one would expect from one of Europe's leading early wind ensembles. The programme consists largely of Renaissance and early Baroque music and opens with an instrumental performance of Thomas Ravenscroft's canon *The wind blows out of the west* introduced by wind machine and accompanied by gentle percussion. The sprightly opening and chirrupy fanfare calls are exactly the sort of perky texture that these musicians serve best. Continuing with *Westron Wynde* in a section of the programme called 'Gone with the Wind', John Sheppard's *Gloria* from his *Mass 'The Western Wynde'* is performed by soprano and instrumental ensemble. This is an extraordinary work, so different here with the warm reeds and occasional embellishments from the classic vocal recording by The Tallis Scholars (Gimell, 9/93). Instead of high, soaring phrases we have something contained and brisk. It's not unattractive, but at some of the more complex passages such as 'Suscipe deprecationem nostram' and the change to triple time for 'Cum Sancto Spiritu', metrical accuracy takes precedence over musical flow.

The album's subtitle, 'Tales of Flying Creatures and Heavenly Breezes', indicates what is probably the best section of the programme: 'Winged Creatures'. Beginning with the hugely popular *Canaries* by Thoinot Arbeau and Michael Praetorius, this ensemble bring an infectious rhythmic drive and obvious joy to these simple tunes. Listen also for the bird-calls and crystal-clear sopranos in Monteverdi's *Dolcissimo uscignolo*.

This enjoyable album has a stylish snap, especially in the dance music that Capella de la Torre perform so well. And, as ever with this superb ensemble, the percussion subtly steals the show at every opportunity. I defy anyone to sit still through Praetorius's *Ballet de bouteille*. **Edward Breen**

'Free America!'

'Early Songs of Resistance and Rebellion'
Works by **Anonymous, Arne, Billings, Commuck, Ingalls, Law, Read, Sawyer** and **Williamson**

The Boston Camerata / Anne Azéma

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2628 (60' • DDD • T/t)



As the New Union that was America strove to establish itself towards the end of the 1700s,

music had a role to play just as it did elsewhere. Unity, liberty and democracy were the ideals but the population was disparate, culturally and religiously. America needed a wholesale coming together, in which process the idea of the 'common man' was born, carrying with it notions of spirituality and social harmony.

Catches, ditties, laments, Shaker songs and tavern songs are included in this five-chapter journey through that march to freedom (and the first tastes of it) from The Boston Camerata. Much sounds like folk song but everything is notated, with part-songs often cast in what Anne Azéma refers to in the notes as 'rough-hewn frontier harmonies'. There are even hijacked versions of English staples – from the various incarnations of our *When David heard* twisted into anti-monarchical protest, to a version of *Rule, Britannia!* using the words 'Rise, Columbia!'

The results are homespun but stirring, thanks in no small part to the disc's journey from rallying to repentance and eventually pride (we get a taste of modern American confidence in *Free Americay!*, which commandeers the tune of *The British Grenadier*. Most impressive is this group's channelling of 'a young society full of vigour' in performances that prioritise the time and the feeling over any idea of perfection or the concert hall. There is immense soul in the solo vocal numbers – Deborah Rentz-Moore in *Repentance*, Joel Frederiksen's steamboat bass in *My body rock 'long fever* – and the band has bite, with its fizzy fiddle and piercing flutes. For all the fun, those 'Boston rascals and insolent scallywags', you're left with a touching picture of struggle and sacrifice.

Andrew Mellor

'Japan'

Hosokawa Die Lotosblume **Kondō** Motet under the Rose **Mamiya** Composition for Chorus No 1 **Takemitsu** Cherry Blossoms. Small Sky. Wind Horse. Wings

SWR Vocal Ensemble / Marcus Creed

SWR Classic © SWR19079CD (68' • DDD • T/t)



Each new album in this series has brought epiphanies. Juxtapositions of Verdi

with Scelsi, Debussy with Aperghis and Barber with Cage invite us to resist lazy thinking about a particular nation's choral tradition. With their customary polish and assurance, the SWR Vokalensemble and Marcus Creed now challenge any straight answer to the question of 'What is Japanese choral music?'

With the gentle tintinnabulations and soft-focus clusters opening Toshio Hosokawa's *Lotus Blossom*, for example, we are transported to the pentagonal gardens and Shinto temples of familiar postcards both visual and musical. The abrupt climax is a Noh theatre device, while its placing at the golden-section point owes something to Western forms. In 1967 Pierre Boulez wrote that 'The musical systems of East and West cannot have any bearing on one another', but each of the four composers represented here makes his own elegant riposte. The most original and ambitious work is also the most recent: *Motet under the Rose* by Jō Kondō (b1947), who sets a text by the symbolist poet Kambara Ariake with a great deal more subtlety than the translation he supplies for the booklet: 'Aus dem tiefstem Grund' would seem to convey the sense of both the text and of Kondō's exquisitely pitched clusters, at least more so than 'At the bottom of the bottoms'.

Takemitsu is an unavoidable presence, represented by a trio of saccharine songs – but then Japanese sweets make a virtue of cloying sweetness and eye-watering colours – and more valuably by the five-movement *Wind Horse* cycle (1962-66). Each of three vocalises finds its own expressive world within rich, added-seventh harmonies, while the two songs leave Messiaen aside for settings of elliptical stories as tense and understated as a Kurosawa film.

Drawn much more from a local and vernacular tradition is the unpromisingly titled *Composition for Chorus No 1* by Michio Mamiya (b1929), a leading member of the 'Goat' group of composers who looked towards Bartók as a paradigm of national modernism in which one objective need

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Bach Academy Bruges 2020

Chez Bach

With over 50 famous musicians and composers, the Bachs are undeniably one of the most musical families ever. The greatest of all the Bachs, 'Sebastian' to his friends, is owed a huge debt of gratitude here: not only did he ensure that all of his sons became musicians, he also trained a steady stream of pupils to become his 'spiritual children'. This tenth Bach Academy Bruges opens the door on Bach's private life and on that of his family. A memorable occasion, made even more unforgettable because in 2020 we will be feting our guest of honour Philippe Herreweghe, whose Collegium Vocale Gent is celebrating its 50th birthday.

Discover our unique sound in Concertgebouw Brugge

Fri 17.01.20
20:00

Collegium Vocale Gent | Mendelssohn. Jesu, meine Freude

Bach's best pupil. For this festival opener, Philippe Herreweghe has put together an atmospheric programme, with choral motets, in which the Romantic composer looks back tenderly at his Baroque hero.

Sat 18.01.20
20:00

Vox Luminis | The road to Leipzig

Bach's most beautiful cantatas, before he was 'the' Bach. Before his name became forever linked with Leipzig, he was employed by several princes and churches. Vox Luminis visit Bach in Mühlhausen and Weimar and bring us four of his most moving early cantatas.

Sun 19.01.20
20:00

Collegium Vocale Gent | In der süßen Ewigkeit

You can't ask Philippe Herreweghe to play his favourite Bach cantatas – the time allotted for a concert just wouldn't be long enough. He has, however, selected three of those illustrious works to close his jubilee edition of the Bach Academy.

not compromise the other. There is a bad edit and a false entry at 0'20" in the third of the Composition's four movements but performances and production otherwise live up to the high standards of the series as a whole. **Peter Quantrill**

'Leningrad Choir Concertos'

Falik Poesas of Igor Severyanin^a **Prigozhin** Symphony in Rituals^b **Salmanov** Swan Maiden^c **SM Slonimsky** And Quiet Flows the Don^a
^b**Khanyafi Chinakaev** *ob* ^c**Leningrad Radio & Television Choir / Grigory Sandler**; ^a**Leningrad State Capella Choir / Vladislav Chernushenko**;
^b**vocal ensemble / Valentina Kopylova**
 Northern Flowers © NF/PMA99134 (63' • DDD)
 Recorded ^b1981, ^a1982, ^c1985



While not an exclusively Russian phenomenon, the choir concerto

flourished there during the 18th and early 19th centuries – reaching its apex with the work of Dmitry Bortnyansky (1751-1825), before its revival in the post-war era (notably Alfred Schnittke's magisterial example from 1985). The four pieces featured here follow directly, if never slavishly, in that tradition.

Within this context, Vadim Salmanov's *Swan Maiden* (1967) was an undoubted breakthrough by deriving inspiration not from sacred music but from Russian folk sources – though no traditional tunes appear over its five movements. Division between solo and ensemble groups is abetted by recourse to recited and shouted passages, in what was evidently a provocative move at this time. A decade on, the other pieces adopt a more nuanced approach to their cultural 'present'.

Inspired by Mikhail Sholokhov's novel, Sergey Slonimsky's *And Quiet Flows the Don* (1977) draws on old Cossack songs for a text whose setting utilises modality and solo singing in its incisive reappraisal of tradition. Lucian Prigozhin's *Symphony in Rituals* (1978) is both more formally methodical and evocatively expressive in alternating between songs and interludes (denoted by plaintive oboe soliloquys) that suggest archaic practices played out in inherently abstract terms. Yuri Falik's *Poesas of Igor Severyanin* (1979) deploys texts by the early 20th-century poet in a suite whose titles indicate the musical archetype specific to each movement.

Performances unfailingly convey the eloquence and vitality of this music, in another valuable restoration from that

seemingly endless resource which is the St Petersburg Musical Archive.

Richard Whitehouse

'A Love Letter to Liverpool'

Songs associated with Liverpool
Jennifer Johnston *mez* **Alisdair Hogarth** *pf*
Liverpool Philharmonic Youth Choir; Liverpool Philharmonic Training Choir and Melody Makers; Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Chorus and Orchestra / Ian Tracey
 Rubicon © RCD1044 (75' • DDD • T)



There's more to Liverpool's musical identity than Lennon and McCartney. A few

years ago the RLPO released a series of discs exploring Merseyside's Edwardian musical heritage. Now, under the auspices of the RLPS, Jennifer Johnston has released a song recital inspired by her native city – drawing on songs with a broadly maritime theme by Charles Ives, John Ireland and others, as well as new arrangements of songs from the city's folk and pop traditions. It's all in aid of Liverpool's Alder Hey children's hospital and the RLPO's youth company.

The result is musically satisfying and rather touching, and Johnston lends her warm, communicative mezzo to a range of idioms. Together with pianist Alisdair Hogarth she enters into the romantic spirit of Bantock's 'Song to the Seals', as well as settings of Irish melodies and Michael Head's expansive 'The Estuary', and it's good to hear an excerpt from Mark Simpson's *Pleasure*, even without its orchestral colours. (Interestingly, a snippet of Paul McCartney's *Liverpool Oratorio* sounds more affecting when pared down than it ever did in its original blockbuster context). Johnston deploys her best Bold Street vowels to droll effect in Stephen Hough's 'Madam and her Madam'.

The most intriguing parts of the disc are the new works; no fewer than eight, all specially commissioned for the occasion. Carmel Smickersgill and Richard Miller give sparse, Britten-like makeovers to 'In my Liverpool home' and 'The Leaving of Liverpool', while Bethan Morgan-Williams transforms 'Liverpool Lullaby' into a haunted miniature music-drama. I'd like to have been told more about the composers (and Evertonians will bridle at the implication that 'You'll never walk alone' is a universally loved Scouse anthem). But the cause is good, and the musical content is as intriguing as it is enjoyable. Don't hold back. **Richard Bratby**

'Routes du café'

JS Bach Cantata No 211, Schweigt stille, plaudert nicht, 'Coffee Cantata' **Bernier** Le caffè **Bey** Taksim & Mahur peşrev **Dede** Rast dilârâ peşrev. Rast dilârâ saz semâi. Taksim ney. Taksim oud **Kajioka** Taksim kaman. Wahda sarabande **Locke** Fantasia in D minor **Marais** Saillie du caffè **Hana Blažíková** *sop* **Reinoud Van Mechelen** *ten* **Lisandro Abadie** *bass* **Adrien Espinouze** *ney* **Evgenios Voulgaris** *yaylı tanbur* **Pierre Rigopoulos** *perc* **Ensemble Masques / Olivier Fortin**
 Alpha © ALPHA543 (72' • DDD • T/t)



If one searches for *Zimmermannsche Kaffeehaus* online, up comes its location

in Katharinenstrasse, Leipzig, the map helpfully annotated with the red note 'permanently closed'. That would be because the coffee house frequented by Johann Sebastian Bach was bombed in an Allied air raid in 1943. Although a fine Baroque ensemble now bears the name Café Zimmermann, I'm surprised no enterprising soul has sought to resurrect the building itself.

Coffee was all the rage in Europe by the time Bach was composing, strengthening its caffeinated grip across the continent ever since the mid-16th century, when the first cafés appeared in Constantinople. It reached Germany in 1670. In Leipzig, Gottfried Zimmermann opened his café in 1715, putting on concerts on Friday evenings to drive trade. Almost certainly written for Zimmermann's, Bach's *Coffee Cantata* (1735) takes the form of an argument between a daughter and her father, who tries to get her to kick the coffee-drinking habit.

However, Bach's secular cantata had a notable French forebear in Nicolas Bernier's *Le caffè*, which extols the heady virtues of the drink, to a libretto by Louis Fuzelier. These two works form the backbone of this fabulous new disc from Olivier Fortin and Ensemble Masques, a paean to coffee given Turkish context by sensuously interleaving them with music from the Ottoman Empire. This includes works by Nâyî Osman Dede and improvisations on the ney flute, yaylı tanbur and kaman. It reminds me a little of the cross-genre collaboration between Concerto Köln and Sarband ('Dream of the Orient' – Archiv, 10/04), if minus its exuberant janissary percussion.

The playing of Ensemble Masques is suitably lip-smacking, Anna Besson's flute nicely in the foreground sharing the limelight with Hana Blažíková's pert soprano in Bernier's frothy cantata. The

GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

NEW FROM NORWAY

Andrew Mellor samples a flurry of new and almost-new vocal music on recent releases from Norway's three major classical labels



Tone Bianca Sparre Dahl draws atmospheric sounds from Oslo's Schola Cantorum

Norway doesn't just have beautiful new concert halls and the financial clout to poach excellent conductors at work in bigger countries. It has a virile new music scene that none of its three major classical labels ignores. If it still feels like a young country in contemporary music terms, that has its benefits. Norway is in the midst of a fresh and multifaceted examination of its own musical traditions, a gesture that recurs time and again in postmodern Norwegian music but has crept into performance practice too.

Radical techniques including folk-style ornamentation and tone production were introduced to the Oslo Chamber Choir by its founder, Grete Pedersen. We hear more than a little residue of both on the album **Veneliti**, conducted by Pedersen's successor, Håkon Daniel Nystedt – a collection of ballads, chants and laments from the Middle Ages, deftly recomposed by Ørjan Matre. This focused choir relishes the harmonic frisson whether in simple hymnody or swirling polyphony. Those folk stylistics – keening ornamentations that would have spilt out from celebrating or grieving

congregations – are highly evocative (particularly in *Und mig, Gud*). It is an engrossing journey even as, at the end of *Ny dagens lys*, it suddenly drops out. Quite a moment.

Sound is first-rate on 'Veneliti' but with **Trachea**, Morten Lindberg's audiophile label 2L has some tricks to get its teeth into. Most notably in the title-track by Martin Ødegaard, a wordless, vibrating Rothko of a piece for the multiple windpipes of double choir and four rasping horns, in which the spatial sound emphasises Ødegaard's ability to momentarily hold something in the air even as his waves of sound keep coming.

There is a fine line between fluffy stuff and cloudbursts of real invention; I'm not convinced by Ståle Kleiberg's *Alt i universet* or Frøy Aagre's *Gloria*. Karin Rehnqvist's *When I Close My Eyes I Dream of Peace* makes a marginally better impression in the generous acoustic of Uranienborg Church than it did at the 2018 Nordic Music Days in Helsinki, but there's far more fertility in Bjørn Morten Christophersen's *Oak and Mayfly*, which claws its way up through a story by Hans Christian Andersen with sure

counterpoint that takes the long view. Schola Cantorum under Tone Bianca Sparre Dahl sound impressive and know how to work the atmospheric sound.

Cecilie Ore's stripped-back aesthetic has produced a string of works where text overrides music while rendering the music even more vital for its apparent invisibility (a quality that aligns her, in some respects, with Howard Skempton). The works on Nordic Voices' 'Come to the Edge' are described as 'more pre-classical than modernist' in Geir Johnson's perceptive booklet note; they are filled with Ore's mobilising scorn for social injustice. Offered cold on a CD, however, they appear trite. *Come to the Edge* itself sets texts from the Moscow trial of Pussy Riot and, as in *The Vatican Trilogy*, basic shapes and speech rhythms become chant. But word-painting is predictable and rhythms become stale. The most successful piece, heard outside the context of the theatrical landscape in which Ore thrives, is *Who Do You Think You Are?*, perhaps because solo soprano Eir Inderhaug is focused enough to create a virtual theatre of her own.

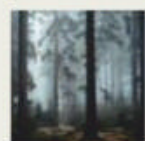
Equally sparse, a lot less angry but far more affecting is the music of the composer and jazz musician **Helge Iberg**. *Songs from the Planet of Life* sets the Chinese texts used by Mahler in *Das Lied von der Erde* (we hear them variously, in Chinese and English recitation, and set to music in English). The bitter twist is Iberg's conviction that where Mahler saw nature as source of both protection and redemption, we as humans now find ourselves in the converse position of having to do the protecting. These are delicate landscapes of melancholy and vitality, scored with a jazz musician's ear for reactivity and improvisation. Textures range from full orchestra to a handful of dream-team soloists (Christian Ihle Hadland, Elise Båtnes), while Marianne Beate Kielland and Frank Havrøy are moving vocalists. There's noodling and suspect evocations of Zen, but the deeper message gets through, and lingers. In direct counterpoint to Mahler's piece, we sense a creeping, fatal unease and beauty as both tease and tantaliser.

Economy of both means and sound was de rigueur in Nordic music when **Ketil Hvoslef** studied in the 1960s. The sixth volume in LAWO's survey of Hvoslef's chamber music is a sit-up-and-listen treat, from foghorn japes of the Trombone Quartet to the similar sardonic humour of the Clarinet Quintet.

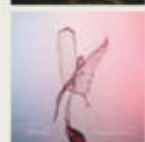
In the Trio for Hardanger fiddle, soprano and piano we hear elements physical and musical thrown together, prised apart and then reassembled, before the soprano walks away still singing. *Alcotral* is described as 'a miserably failed audition for the Eurovision Song Contest', a festive work in which four singers fight four strings and four winds ('trio' refers to form), before collapsing exhausted into a drumbeat timed to comic perfection. Hvoslef's voice is always one worth hearing.

On a second disc, the Oslo-based Ensemble Ernst turn their gaze to younger composers. **Xtended Hearts and Unheard Herds** is a follow-up to the engrossing album '... BUT ...', which also showcased work commissioned by the ensemble. There are some excellent works here, loosely united by the idea of Nordic nature music as something that can grow out of itself by spectral or rhythmic means (sometimes both). The standout pieces are Đuro Živković's *On the Guarding of the Heart*, a symphonic journey for a small mass of instrumental voices through varied states of agitation. Jan Martin Smørdal's (*herd*) *STUDY* explores flock mentality via a classic pattern piece played and sung, but skewed with all manner of microtonal distortions. It is the old Nordic idea of a simple principle generating a complex construct, done with such humanity you can almost hear the musical organism breathe. Beautiful. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Various Cpsrs Veneliti
Oslo Chamber Choir / Nystedt
2L © 2L153



Various Cpsrs Trachea
Schola Cantorum / Dahl
2L © 2L154



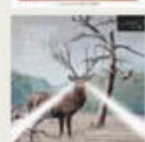
Ore Come to the Edge
Nordic Voices
Aurora © ACD5095



Iberg Songs from the Planet of Life
Norwegian Rad Orch / Myrann
Aurora © ACD5093



Hvoslef Chamber Works, Vol 6
Hvoself Chamber Music Project
LAWO © LWC1180



Various Cpsrs Xtended Hearts ...
Ensemble Ernst / Rimul
LAWO © LWC1177

'Air gay', which praises coffee's properties as hangover cure, proves particularly delicious. Blažiková is also the stubborn daughter in Bach's barista gig, to Lisandro Abadie's grumpy father. 'Ah, how sweet the taste of coffee', she sings, 'better than a thousand kisses'. It's a persuasive argument.

The Turkish numbers percolate vivid oriental colour, closely recorded to aid the impression you're tucked up in an intimate coffee house somewhere, whether in Constantinople, Leipzig or Paris. Or, indeed, in London, for we take a small musical detour to The Turk's Head – otherwise known as 'Miles' Coffee House' – in Westminster, where Samuel Pepys met Matthew Locke, hence the latter's Fantasia in D minor.

Imaginatively programmed, beautifully played and recorded, this is disc as delightful as a cup of the black gold itself.

Mark Pullinger

'Saga'

Jensen Gesänge, Op 5 – Waldesgespräch. Romanzen und Balladen, Op 41 – Die Braut; Rübezahl **Loewe** Balladen, Op 1 – Erbkönig. Balladen, Op 2 – Herr Oluf. Odins Meeresritt, Op 118. Tom der Reimer, Op 135a **Schubert** Gruppe aus dem Tartarus, D583. Prometheus, D674. Der Zwerg, D771 **Schumann** Belsatzar, Op 57. Romanzen und Balladen, Op 49 – Die beiden Grenadiere; Die feindlichen Brüder **Konstantin Krimmel** bar **Doriana Tchakarova** pf Alpha © ALPHA549 (63' • DDD • T/t)



German ballads, with their supernatural 19th-century narratives and less-

than-exalted reputation, might seem to be an odd starting point in the recording career of the promising, much-awarded German-Romanian baritone Konstantin Krimmel. But singers from Elisabeth Schwarzkopf onwards to current baritones have recorded the ballads of Carl Loewe early in their careers, though rarely in ways so fully realised as this. Conviction, insight and a rightness of presentation are the hallmarks of this collection by Krimmel and pianist Doriana Tchakarova. Beautifully annotated and recorded, the recording is a success on every level.

Superficially, ballads can seem like Lieder that don't know when to stop. The basic elements are melodic simplicity, graphically descriptive piano parts and storytelling priorities that prompted Loewe, in particular, to interrupt the musical flow with a rhetorical point or begin a completely new musical idea when

the plot turns a significant corner. Thus a single ballad can seem like several songs in one. Tragic conclusions are standard (often amid weddings), but if there's eternal damnation, it's more from questionable decisions rather than from unpardonable sins. In his booklet notes, Krimmel explains that he chose ballads populated by dwarfs, kings and deities to form a narrative concerning 'human longing for love and perfection and the constant struggle with forces of destiny that oppose it'. The cross section of composers is also appreciated.

The nearly unknown Adolf Jensen (1837-79) maintained an immense gift for melodic vocal lines even in the most histrionic moments. Having written ballads from the beginning of his creative life, Schubert had the form well in hand and was truly at his best in 'Der Zwerg' and 'Gruppe aus dem Tartarus'. He achieved long-term flow allowing the narrative to build without any break but never with the straitjacketing effect of strict, strophic form. Schumann brought more evolved piano-writing to the unthinkable events dramatised in 'Belsatzar', and just as you're about to conclude that the ballad wasn't really his thing, the empty patriotism portrayed in 'Die beiden Grenadiere' with its quotation of the Marseillaise shows how ballads could well have paved the way for the outspoken cabaret music of the Weimar Republic.

With multiple voices in any given ballad, Krimmel stops just short of donning gimmick vocal disguises, his interpretative compass mainly being a convincing projection of the emotions at hand with rich resources of vocal colour, text articulation and freedom of tempo. Finest moments include the quiet supernatural terror achieved in Loewe's 'Erbkönig': Krimmel gives voice to the malevolent fairy not just with a lighter voice but with an intensity suggesting secrets whispered into the child's ear – skilfully framed by the soft blanket effect of Tchakarova's accompanying pianism.

Clearly, Krimmel and Tchakarova take this music seriously with thoughtful balance of vocal and rhetorical elements, and fewer emotional filters compared to Florian Boesch's more suave Loewe disc (Hyperion, 8/11) and the aristocratic formality of Thomas Quasthoff (EMI/Warner, 2/90). Oddly, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Jörg Demus are unassuming, almost as if ballads are children's stories in their Loewe set (DG, 7/71). The only approach I prefer to Krimmel is Henk Neven (Onyx, 7/11), in which Loewe is sort of a warm-up to Schumann, and with a greater sense of bare nerve-endings that intensifies the music's emotional authenticity. **David Patrick Stearns**

WHAT NEXT?

Do you have a favourite piece of music and want to explore further? Our monthly feature suggests some musical journeys that venture beyond the most familiar works, with some recommended versions. This month **James Jolly**'s point of departure is ...

Fauré's Requiem (1887–1900)

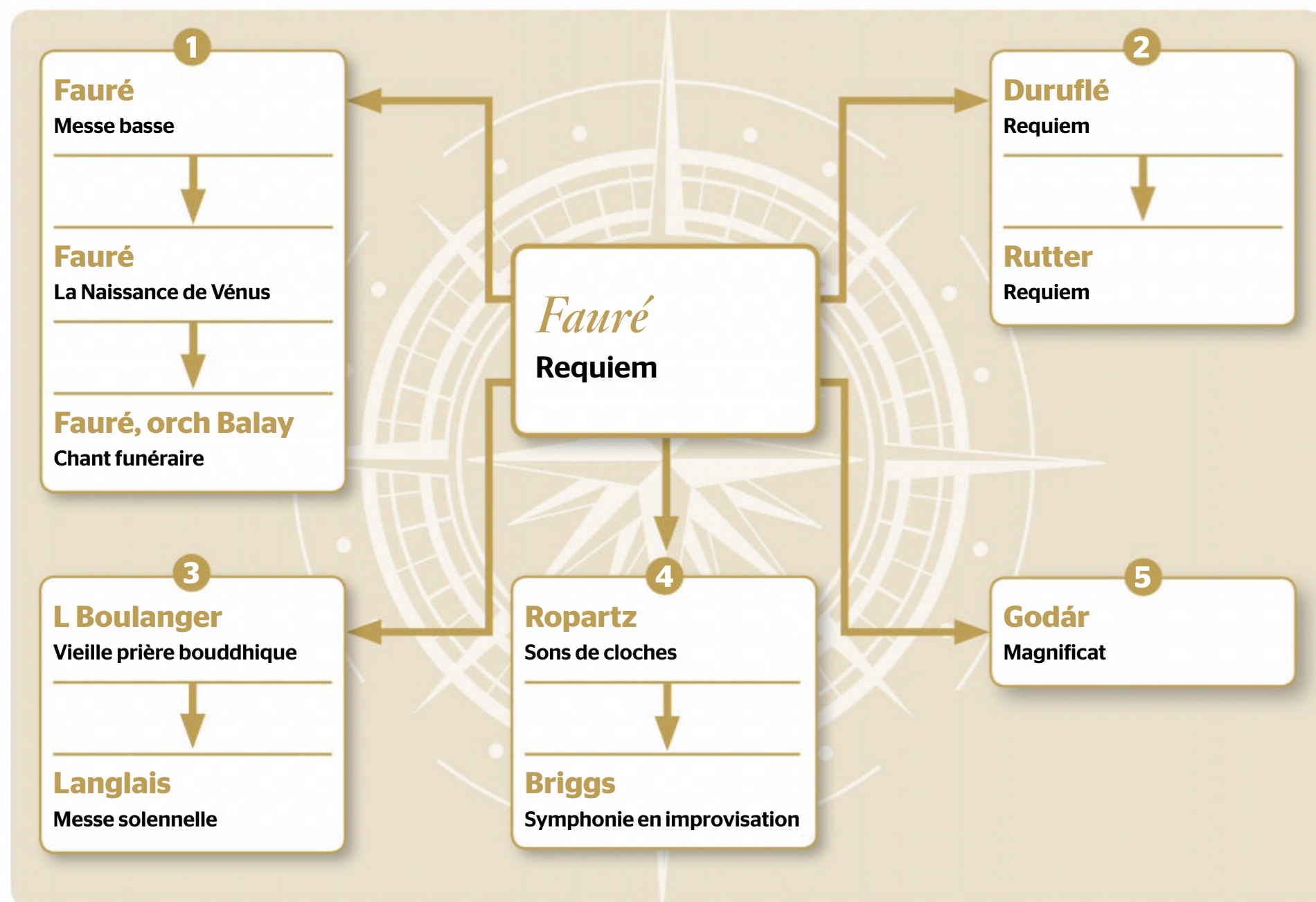
Fauré's is one of the best-loved settings of the Requiem Mass. He started writing it in 1887, completing a shorter version in 1890. He subsequently revised it and the version we often hear today, with orchestral accompaniment, was finished in 1900. Its language sidesteps the fire and brimstone of the settings by Verdi and Berlioz (Fauré omits the *Dies irae* sequence, but does include the gentler and consolatory *Pie Jesu*). Of the numerous recordings of the work, Laurence Equilbey's Paris version (using the edition for chamber orchestra – without violins – and organ) has a wonderful sense of atmosphere set in a near ideal acoustic.

● Piau *sop* Degout *bar* Accentus; Fr Nat Orch / Equilbey (Naïve, 8/09)

1 *More Fauré*

Fauré Messe basse (1881) This was originally written in collaboration with André Messager, but Fauré later dropped Messager's contributions and ultimately published it as four movements. Early Fauré, it is characterised by a purity of sound thanks to its use of a three-part women's choir. The sinuous lines, unfurled over a gentle organ accompaniment – with some surprising harmonic twists – prefigure some of the Requiem's music.

● Etheridge *org* Choir of King's College, Cambridge / Cleobury (King's College, 10/14)



Fauré La naissance de Vénus

(1882) Predating the Requiem, *The Birth of Venus* demonstrates Fauré's superb handling of the orchestra (there's a whiff of Franck and Wagner about the score), particularly in the interplay of winds and strings. And while Paul Collin's text is a little trite, it is set with great sensitivity, and Jupiter's long solo is beautifully shaped.

● Sols; City of Birmingham Sym Chor; BBC PO / Tortelier (Chandos, A/03)

Fauré, orch Balay Chant

funéraire (1921) Written after Fauré's retirement from the Paris Conservatoire and as a government commission to mark the centenary of Napoleon's death, the *Chant funéraire* is conceived for wind band (Fauré himself didn't orchestrate it). It has a potent sense

of grief and sadness that the Requiem avoids, yet the steady gait is slightly reminiscent of the Requiem's heavenly *Libera me*.

● Musique des Gardiens de la Paix / Dondeyne (Calliope, 10/75)

2 Direct descendants

Durufié Requiem (1947) In nine sections, and following the tradition established by Fauré (focusing just on the *Pie Jesu* from the *Dies irae*), Durufé's Requiem is nearly as popular as Fauré's. Available in settings for organ (1948 – my chosen version here) or orchestra, it also employs two soloists, with that heart-easing *Pie Jesu* placed at its heart and given to a mezzo.

● Johnston mez Davies bass Jorysz org Choir of Clare College, Cambridge / Ross (Harmonia Mundi, 12/16)

Rutter Requiem (1985) John Rutter's setting, like the Fauré, is couched in a gentler language (though not as sugary as either Andrew Lloyd Webber's or Karl Jenkins's settings), and his abundant gift for melody and thrilling handling of massed voices have made this a much-loved modern favourite. It combines biblical verses with parts of the Latin Mass.

● Choir of King's College, Cambridge; City of London Sinfonia / Cleobury (Warner Classics, 5/98)

3 A French pair

L Boulanger Vieille prière bouddhique (1917) A pupil of Fauré, the short-lived Lili Boulanger (sister of the celebrated pedagogue Nadia) had a vivid and highly original musical voice. Her best-known choral work is her substantial setting of Psalm 130, *Du fond de l'abîme*, but closer in mood to Fauré's Requiem is her shorter *Old Buddhist Prayer* with its exotic, perfumed harmonies and mood of quiet reverence.

● Monteverdi Choir; LSO / Gardiner (DG, 11/02)

Langlais Messe solennelle (1951) Arguably Jean Langlais's finest choral work, this Mass setting, cast in darker shades and on a larger scale than the Fauré, is striking for its drama. Langlais's mastery of the organ is everywhere apparent and he weaves organ and voice together with genuine mastery.



In his Requiem, Fauré avoided the potent sense of grief and sadness that is evident in his later Chant funéraire for wind band

The great shafts of light that are cast over the music are slightly reminiscent of Poulenc's Concerto for organ, timpani and strings.

● Picton-Turbervill org Choir of St John's College, Cambridge / Nethsingha Chandos (4/15)

4 Losing the voices

Ropartz Sons de cloches (1913) This three-movement orchestral suite by Joseph Guy Ropartz, a pupil of Massenet and Franck, and clearly influenced by Debussy, is painted in brighter colours than the Fauré, but is deliciously French in its evocation of bells (portrayed in a far-from-obvious language). There is a delicacy and transparency to the orchestration that has great appeal.

● Bretagne Orchestra / Verrot (Timpani)

Briggs Symphonie en improvisation (2003) David Briggs is one of the most Francophile of British composer-organists, so his magnificent *Messe pour Notre-Dame* (on Hyperion) would be an obvious recommendation; but, easily streamed, his *Symphonie en improvisation* is an imposing structure, played here by the composer at the end of a recording session at Blackburn Cathedral. It's great to have it captured for posterity so splendidly – and in such an agreeable acoustic.

● Briggs org (Priory)

5 A long shot ...

Godár Magnificat (2003) Vladimír Godár's haunting *Magnificat* for solo female voice with choir and chamber orchestra may be a bit of a jump from the Fauré but there's something of his spirit in this arresting score. The apparent simplicity of texture (emphasised here by Iva Bittová's 'unclassical', almost raw, tone) is enormously affecting. Repetition, vividly interrupted by startling stabbing motifs from the strings, helps build the work inexorably to a climax.

● Bittová voc Bratislava Conservatory Choir; Solamente Naturale / Štrýncl (ECM New Series, 5/07)

Available to stream on Apple Music

Opera



Richard Bratby enjoys the first recording of any Stanford opera:

'No one goes to Stanford for shock value, and The Travelling Companion is a gentle, often wistful score' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 101**



Neil Fisher listens to a Verdi album from Russian bass Ildar Abdrazakov:

'The expectation of a black-hued, cavernous bass sound – à la Boris Christoff – is confounded early on' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 102**

M-A Charpentier

Les arts florissants

Teresa Wakim *sop* La Musique
Jesse Blumberg *bar* La Discorde
Margot Rood *sop* La Paix
Molly Netter *sop* La Poésie
Aaron Sheehan *ten* La Peinture
Virginia Warnken *mez* L'Architecture
John Taylor Ward *bar* Warrior

Les plaisirs de Versailles

Teresa Wakim *sop* La Musique
Virginia Warnken *mez* La Conversation
Jesse Blumberg *bar* Comus
Jason McStoots *ten* Le Jeu
Aaron Sheehan *ten* Un Plaisir

Boston Early Music Festival Vocal & Chamber

Ensembles / Paul O'Dette, Stephen Stubbs

CPO © CPO555 283-2 (75' • DDD)

Includes synopses, librettos and translations



Having recently welcomed the first interpretation of *Les arts florissants*

to have been recorded for nearly 40 years, within a few months here is another. The chamber ensemble of the Boston Early Music Festival constitutes a number of musicians close to the probable forces Charpentier had at his disposal at the household of his patron the Mademoiselle de Guise in 1685. La Musique is declaimed elegantly by Teresa Wakim, Poetry is sung articulately by Molly Netter and Painting is navigated mellifluously by Aaron Sheehan, who duets with Virginia Warnken's solemn Architecture. Amid explaining how they glorify Louis XIV, the four flourishing arts also placate a chorus of rowdy warriors (their gentle relief at hearing Music's celestial harmony is judged sweetly by the small ensemble of singers). The rude interruption of Jesse Blumberg's extrovert Discord and the Furies (brought to theatrical life by witchy nasal hamming-up from the chorus) has transparent delight from

the entire ensemble at the unsettling displacement of rhythmical stresses; this sophisticated portrayal of anti-artistic philistinism is banished by Margot Rood's firmly authoritative Peace. Poetry's restoration of the cultivated idyll contains beautifully played minuets, and the concluding chaconne praising the arts has softly sensuous harmonic clarity.

The Bostonians also perform *Les plaisirs de Versailles*, recorded by Christie over 20 years ago, although there is also a DVD of a Versailles production by Les Folies Françaises (Armide, 2005). Probably created for the royal apartments soon after 1682, perhaps for the amusement of the Dauphin (who was one of Charpentier's patrons), the divertissement is a witty allegory of an evening's pleasures at Versailles. A quarrel between the refined Music and the babbling Conversation is mediated by Comus (the god of feasting), who offers the opponents delicious hot chocolate, wine and food, but to little avail. Le Jeu (Games) fares no better with his diversions. Nevertheless, the bickering pair are reconciled amid an outburst of laughter; onlooking 'Pleasures' who have been switching sides with each disputant now express gentle satisfaction at the outcome. Charpentier's manuscript tells us it should last half an hour, so Paul O'Dette and Stephen Stubbs's pacing is spot-on. Wakim's La Musique fluctuates between beguiling poeticism and irritation at Warnken's aristocratic La Conversation, who cannot sit in silence. Blumberg's Comus is a genteel connoisseur of delicacies, whereas Jason McStoots's Le Jeu is a playful trickster. Throughout the charming performances of both divertissements, captivating interplay between superb instrumentalists, articulate solo voices and choruses of refined intimacy are de rigueur.

David Vickers

Les arts florissants – selected comparison:

Jarry (4/19) (CHAT) CVS001

Les plaisirs de Versailles – selected comparison:

Christie (2/97) (ERAT) 0630 14774-2

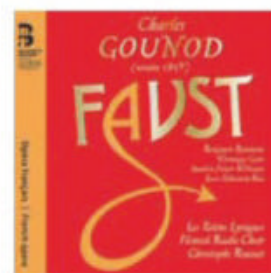
Gounod

Faust

Benjamin Bernheim *ten* Faust
Véronique Gens *sop* Marguerite
Andrew Foster-Williams *bass-bar* Méphistophélès
Jean-Sébastien Bou *bar* Valentin
Juliette Mars *mez* Siébel
Anas Séguin *bar* Wagner
Ingrid Perruche *mez* Marthe
Flemish Radio Choir; Les Talens Lyriques /
Christophe Rousset

Bru Zane © ③ BZ1037 (174' • DDD)

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



Hot on the heels of Naxos's release of the '1864 version' of Gounod's hit opera (A/19), here comes a release of genuine historical and musicological interest. This '1859 Paris' version features the score as we've never heard it before – before the recitatives (added in the early 1860s), before 'Avant de quitter ces lieux' (composed for London) and before a great deal else too. It's little short of a revelation, in which some century and a half of performance tradition is scraped away to reveal a witty, fleet-footed work that comes close to the composer's (and librettists') original conception.

But things are rarely that straightforward – especially with 19th-century French opera – and, as the various essays that come in the hardback book that accompanies this release explain, this is no definitive 'first version', rather a viable version taking into account a huge amount of material originally composed for the work's premiere at Paris's Théâtre-Lyrique in 1859. It is something between an *opéra-comique* and the *grand opéra* it would later become when it transferred to Paris's largest opera stage in 1869.

New (or, rather, subsequently dropped) numbers include a likeable trio for Faust, Siébel and Wagner in the first scene (those two latter roles are fleshed out a great deal in the dialogue); a duet for



Charming performances: Charpentier's *Les arts florissants* and *Les plaisirs de Versailles* are given a rare outing at the Boston Early Music Festival

Valentin and Marguerite; Méphistophélès's 'Maître scarabée' (eventually replaced by 'Le veau d'or'); and an extra chorus for Walpurgisnacht. Siébel has a different little aria, 'Versez vos chagrins dans mon âme!', after Maguerite's Spinning Aria, instead of the lovely 'Si le bonheur'. There are other more fundamental changes: here Act 1 comprises what would later be the first two acts, while, in what's now Act 3, there are two shorter outside scenes either side of the scene in the church – a configuration apparently enabled by some nifty production work on the Théâtre-Lyrique's spacious stage.

All these changes – plus a certain amount of melodrama, some of it specially orchestrated for this release – make the recording a fascinating prospect for anyone interested in this period of operatic history. It also happens to be a terrific recording on its own terms. Benjamin Bernheim, freshly signed to DG, leads the cast as an ardent, fresh-voiced Faust, impeccably stylish, sensitive and with lovely *voix-mixte* at his disposal (displayed to winning effect on the seductive top C of 'Salut! demeure chaste et pure').

Véronique Gens, the booklets explains, is deliberately cast as a heavier-voiced

Marguerite than usual, in keeping with how Gounod envisaged it, and she performs with the expected taste and intelligence, although the voice doesn't seem to be captured at its most alluring. In contrast to the bulldozing basses that became standard in the *grand opéra* *Faust*, Andrew Foster-Williams is lighter – both in voice and characterisation – as a smart, cynical Méphistophélès. The other principals are also excellent, and all of them deal effectively with the dialogue.

Christophe Rousset underpins it all with conducting that is fleet and dramatically engaged. Les Talens Lyriques bring plenty of detail and life to their playing, and the Flemish Radio Choir sing with focus, their relatively small size presumably reflecting the size of the original forces rather than what we've subsequently become used to. Only the set's engineering gives me cause to grumble, with the voices often set too far forwards in an occasionally over-reverberant acoustic – the recording was made in two different venues. But with Palazetto Bru Zane's presentation a model of scholarship and generosity, this is release is otherwise a cause for celebration.

Hugo Shirley

Gounod



La nonne sanglante

Jérôme Boutillier *bar*.....Comte de Luddorf
Luc Bertin-Hugault *bass*.....Baron de Moldaw
Michael Spyres *ten*.....Rodolphe
Vannina Santoni *sop*.....Agnès Moldaw
Jodie Devos *sop*.....Arthur
Jean Teitgen *bass*.....Pierre l'Ermite
Marion Lebègue *mez*.....Agnès, la nonne sanglante
Enguerrand De Hys *ten*.....Fritz/Nightwatchman
Olivia Doray *sop*.....Anna

Accentus; Insula Orchestra / Laurence Equilbey

Stage director **David Bobée**

Video director **François Roussillon**

Naxos © 2 110632; © NBD0097V

(143' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD5.1,

DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Opéra Comique, Paris,

June 10 & 12, 2018

Includes synopsis



La nonne sanglante is drawn from the (very substantial) subplot of *The Monk*, the Gothic horror novel by Matthew

Lewis. Both story and opera feature the supernatural (with no 'rational' explanation

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Classical Music Magazine (UK)
March 2015.

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at the end); but rape, incest, murder, corpses mouldering in vaults, religious hypocrisy – mostly, admittedly, to do with the main part of Lewis’s narrative – find no place in the libretto by Eugène Scribe and Germain Delavigne. There is a murder, it’s true, but it takes place years before the opera begins.

In both novel and opera the legend of the ghost of ‘The bleeding nun’ (unwisely called ‘The bloody nun’ in the subtitles here) is used as cover for Agnès and Rodolphe (Raymond in the book) to elope. But it’s the ghost who keeps the rendezvous. She subsequently haunts Rodolphe, holding him to the vows he swore when he believed her to be his Agnès. She will only lift the curse if Rodolphe avenges her death. Her murderer turns out to have been Rodolphe’s father, Luddorf, her betrothed. Thinking him dead, she had entered a convent; finding him not only alive but married she confronted him, whereupon he stabbed her to death. Rodolphe shrinks from parricide but his dilemma is resolved by Luddorf voluntarily getting himself killed in his son’s place. Lewis’s story is more complicated. The murdered nun is herself a murderess, and her demand is for her unburied bones to be deposited in the vault of the family to which both she and Raymond belong. And Agnès, far from being the virginal character of the opera, is also a nun (do keep up), pregnant by Raymond, given out as dead, but ultimately rescued from subterranean imprisonment.

Scribe and Delavigne relocated the story from Madrid under the Inquisition to 11th-century Bohemia, with Pierre the Hermit brokering peace between the Moldaw and Luddorf families by proposing a marriage between Agnès and Rodolphe’s elder brother. Gounod was happy to accept the libretto, a draft of which had been offered in turn to Berlioz, Félicien David and Verdi. It was only his second opera, given at the Paris Opéra on October 18, 1854: it ran for 11 performances before a change of management led to its being dropped. Less than five years later came *Faust*, probably the most popular opera of the 19th century.

The Overture begins with repeated notes on the horn, imitating the tolling of a bell; this is followed by spooky chromatic phrases. Gounod evidently knew *Der Freischütz*: as well as making much use of the diminished seventh chord, he copied Weber’s writing for sinister low clarinets. And the librettists

gave him a Weber present, Pierre having an affinity with the *Freischütz* Hermit. During the Overture, the director David Bobée has the murder of the Nun by Luddorf enacted in dumb show.

Gounod and his librettists strike a good balance between the supernatural and the ordinary. There are two splendid waltzes in Act 3 (one of them displaced, with its companion *Danse bohémienne*, from Act 4), and light-hearted couplets for Arthur, Rodolphe’s page, who is clearly descended from Urbain, the trouser role in an earlier Scribe opera, *Les Huguenots*. Gounod’s inexperience shows in the Act 1 duet, where the same catchy tune is used for Rodolphe proposing elopement and Agnès begging him to go alone. But in general the drama is handled well. There’s a real frisson to the scene where Rodolphe is confronted by his ancestors; the audience in 1854 might have been reminded of another Meyerbeer opera, *Robert le diable* (Scribe and Delavigne again), and it’s not Gounod’s fault if we are more likely to think of the Ghosts’ High Noon in *Ruddigore*.

The set is plain, with video projections, and the costumes mostly monochrome. Bobée treats the drama with respect, though I do wonder why Rodolphe and Agnès are staring gloomily at the audience at the end rather than falling into each other’s arms. And when Rodolphe says that the Nun is carrying her lamp and dagger, it’s perverse for there to be a dagger but no lamp. Neither Agnès nor the Nun is given an aria but Vannina Santoni and Marion Lebègue come across strongly, especially the latter with her scary eyes. Jodie Devos makes a charming page, and Jérôme Boutillier, who learnt the part in 48 hours, is eloquent in Luddorf’s remorseful aria, ‘De mes fureurs déplorable victime’. The real weight of the action falls on the shoulders of Rodolphe. Michael Spyres is first-rate: assertive in ‘Du Seigneur, pale fiancée’, lyrical in ‘Un jour plus pur’, he sings throughout with generous, open-throated tone. And Laurence Equilbey conducts her choral and orchestral forces with passion.

There’s some carelessness in the translation of the booklet: it was Berlioz who wrote to Gounod, not vice versa, and ballet was compulsory in French opera in the 19th century, not the 20th. But do try this fine performance; then go on to read ‘Monk’ Lewis’s shocker (£8.99 from OUP or Penguin).

Richard Lawrence

Mozart



Don Giovanni

Carlos Álvarez *bar* Don Giovanni
Irina Lungu *sop* Donna Anna
Maria José Siri *sop* Donna Elvira
Natalia Roman *sop* Zerlina
Saimir Pirgu *ten* Don Ottavio
Alex Esposito *bass-bar* Leporello
Christian Senn *bar* Masetto
Rafał Siwek *bass* Commendatore
Arena di Verona Chorus and Orchestra / Stefano Montanari

Stage director **Franco Zeffirelli**

Video director **Andrea Bevilacqua**

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Bonus: Making of Don Giovanni

Recorded live, July 2015

Includes synopsis



They really don’t make them like this any more. Recorded in 2015 and now emerging as a tribute to the late

director-designer Franco Zeffirelli, who died earlier this year, the production is lavish and highly populated, 18th-century Seville in all its Baroque glory. There are monumental sets, cavorting tumblers and eye-poppingly colourful costumes: big wigs, rouged faces, generous décolletages.

Zeffirelli certainly grasped the need for big-picture spectacle in a huge barn like the Roman Arena in Verona. The action is all based around a palazzo facade that doubles up as Donna Anna’s mansion, the Don’s own lair and the public spaces in which Carlos Álvarez’s anti-hero prowls around looking for fresh victims.

Capturing all the comings and goings is a challenge for the video director in this space and the result is unsatisfying – when we aren’t in close-up, the camera either hovers above the action, as if the opera were being shot from a drone, or, equally mystifyingly, we get a view from somewhere below the cast’s feet. Zeffirelli was never a details man, or perhaps he didn’t realise one day we’d be zooming into the show from our sofas, but when Irina Lungu’s Donna Anna finds her father’s blood on the ground, there is no blood to see, and when Masetto is soundly thrashed by Giovanni, his aggressor doesn’t even make contact. Ho hum.

And yet ... There’s still plenty of conviction in this show, and if you overlook the creakiness of some of the stagecraft (a plasticky ‘living statue’ and little razzle dazzle for Giovanni’s demise), Zeffirelli’s

respect for the drama's sheer grandiosity – and the niceties of its social drama – does come through. It's enough for Giovanni to unsheath his sword just a fraction and Masetto knows to back off. Rank and swagger count for nearly everything, so Giovanni has no need to exercise restraint.

Although the playing of the Arena di Verona Orchestra can be erratic, conductor Stefano Montanari falls in sync with the mood of the show and gives us BIG effects – romantic fervour in lingering codas and equally dreamy flights of improvisation from the fortepiano. It's the right framework for the hefty, arena-size voices. Álvarez gets out there and sweats as Don Giovanni, a carnivore let loose in the petting zoo, although let down by a rather woofy serenade that wouldn't get anyone down from their balcony in a hurry.

The standouts are the superb Lungu as Donna Anna, fierce and brilliant in her arias, and Saimir Pirgu's ardent, stylish Ottavio. Maria José Siri's unfocused and sometimes unpitched Donna Elvira is less pleasurable, and Natalia Roman's vibrato-heavy Zerlina blows hot and cold. But Alex Esposito's experienced, wry Leporello is enjoyable, and Christian Senn's Masetto is nicely blokeish – despite his lurid wedding garb. **Neil Fisher**

Mozart

'Zero to Hero'

La Betulia liberata – D'ogni colpa la colpa maggiore **La clemenza di Tito** – Se all'impero, amici Dei **Così fan tutte** – Overture; Ah, lo veggio; Un'aura amorosa **Don Giovanni** – Overture; Dalla sua pace, K540a; Il mio tesoro intanto **Die Entführung aus dem Serail** – Hier soll ich dich denn sehen; Ich baue ganz auf deine Stärke; Konstanze! Konstanze!; Wenn der Freude Tränen fliessen **Idomeneo** – Fuor del mar **Die Zauberflöte** – Dies Bildnis ist bezaubernd schön

Daniel Behle *ten*

L'Orfeo Baroque Orchestra / Michi Gaigg

Sony Classical © 19075 96458-2 (69' • DDD)



'Zero to Hero' proclaims Sony of a recital that begins with the 'loser' Don Ottavio (is he?) and ends with the guilt-ridden anti-hero Idomeneo. Never mind the slick rubric. Buoyed by spirited and colourful support from Michi Gaigg's period band, Daniel Behle confirms his high reputation as a Mozart lyric tenor. His unforced, evenly produced tone is always easy on the ear, his coloratura fluent, his phrasing stylish and sensitive. He can spin

a tender *mezza voce*, as in a dulcet 'Un' aura amorosa', enhanced by soft, 'woody' clarinets and bassoons; and with a seam of metal in his tone, he rises impressively to the bravura challenges of a gargantuan aria from the biblical oratorio *La Betulia liberata* and Idomeneo's anguished 'Fuor del mar', sung in its original, uncut version.

There is character, too, in Behle's singing: a mingled ardour and musing intimacy in Tamino's portrait aria, quivering excitement tempered with elegance in Belmonte's 'O, wie feurig', a roguish smile in the tone in Ferrando's blithe lovesong 'Ah, lo veggio', its volleys of top B flats deftly negotiated. Urgency can get the better of him in Belmonte's 'Wenn der Freude Tränen fliessen' and Ottavio's 'Il mio tesoro', which emerge as jauntily determined marches, short on poetry and grace. Here and elsewhere Behle can be appoggiatura-shy, leaving phrase endings blunt where they should be expressively rounded. That said, it's hard to think of a contemporary tenor who could better encompass the varied demands of these arias. Sadly, Sony's presentation is barely adequate, with a skimpy, gushing note on the arias and no texts or translations. **Richard Wigmore**

Picker

Fantastic Mr Fox

John Brancy *bar* Mr Fox
Krista River *mez* Mrs Fox
Andrew Craig Brown *bass-bar* Farmer Boggis
Edwin Vega *ten* Farmer Bunce
Gabriel Presser *bar* Farmer Bean
Elizabeth Futral *sop* Miss Hedgehog
Tynan Davis *mez* Rita the Rat
Theo Lebow *ten* Mr Porcupine
Andrey Nemzer *countertenor* Agnes the Digger
Gail Novak Mosites *sop* Mavis the Tractor
John Dooley *bar* Badger the Miner
Jonathan Blalock *ten* Burrowing Mole
Boston Children's Chorus; Odyssey Opera;
Boston Modern Orchestra Project / Gil Rose
 BMOP/sound © ② 1065 (83' • DDD)
 Includes libretto



Opera has done much during the past few decades to shed its elite, high-art credentials. In many ways, children's opera ticks all the right boxes in terms of accessibility, communication and participation, yet it's a genre that remains somewhat neglected. The American composer Tobias Picker's adaptation of Roald Dahl's novel *Fantastic Mr Fox* could change all that.

Premiered in 1998 and produced on several occasions since then, this recording is set to bring this engaging work to a wider audience. In fact, Picker insists in the booklet notes that *Fantastic Mr Fox* is not directed at children per se but is in fact a 'family' opera: like those animation films by Pixar, it operates on different levels for both children and adults. For the most part *Fantastic Mr Fox* succeeds.

The story itself, to a libretto by Donald Sturrock, is straightforward enough. Three farmers called Bunce, Boggis and Bean seek revenge on Mr Fox and his family for their constant pillaging of chickens, geese and cider. Gluttony drives Bunce and Boggis to hunt down Mr Fox while greed motivates Bean. Thwarted and frustrated by the clever fox's tactics, Bean hires Agnes the Digger to root him out. While Agnes and Bean's rapacious quest to hunt down Mr Fox only serves to pillage the countryside itself, Mr Fox et al take cover in a nearby forest before joining forces with other creaturely friends to enact their own sweet revenge on the three villainous miscreants.

It's a story that operates on several levels. The animals display 'human' traits – love, care, compassion and consideration for one another – while the humans come across as being either plain stupid or cold and calculating. Picker's colourful, direct neo-tonal style works well in this respect. Themes are adapted to support the narrative rather than serving to illustrate character types. Perhaps inevitably, Picker's melodic lines at times evoke *Peter and the Wolf*, although Stravinsky is the most obvious stylistic reference point – more middle-period neoclassical than the one heard in *Renard*. Boston Children's Chorus do well to tackle some intricate high-vaulting lines, while Boston Modern Orchestra Project add vivid splashes of colour and rhythmic drive to the score. There are some truly tender moments, too, such as Mrs Fox's caring aria in Act 1 scene 2, performed with depth and conviction by mezzo Krista River, or the love duet in Act 3 between Porcupine and Miss Hedgehog. In those moments it's easy to forget that this is a fable and not true to life, and much of the credit has to go to the music itself. **Pwyl ap Siôn**

Rossini

Sigismondo

Marianna Pizzolato *mez* Sigismondo
Hera Hyesang Park *sop* Aldimira
Kenneth Tarver *ten* Ladislao
Il Hong *bass* Ulderico
Guido Loconsolo *bar* Zenovito
Rachel Kelly *mez* Anagilda
Gavan Ring *ten* Radoski

Bavarian Radio Chorus; Munich Radio Orchestra / Keri-Lynn Wilson

BR-Klassik ⑤ ② 900327 (147' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Prinzregententheater, Munich, October 14, 2018

Includes synopsis



It would appear at first glance that the release of this recording of one of Rossini's

more egregious operas has been primarily designed as a promotional exercise for the conductor Keri-Lynn Wilson. How else does one explain that hers is the only artist biography in the 36-page German-English booklet?

She is good. But the singers are good too: an exceptional cast to be assembled for a Sunday radio transmission. But that's Germany for you, the one country in Europe which still has the desire and the wherewithal seriously to invest in opera.

Singing Rossini live under a skilled if sometimes hard-driving conductor is not without its perils, as is occasionally evident with the one soprano in the cast, the gifted Hera Hyesang Park (Rosina in this year's Glyndebourne revival of Rossini's *Il barbiere*), who sings the role of the exiled wife of the delusional Polish king Sigismondo. But she, too, generally acquits herself with distinction, not least in Aldimira's striking Act 2 aria.

Sigismondo, an old-fashioned *travesti* role, is sung by Marianna Pizzolato. Both she and Kenneth Tarver as the king's devious and sexually ambitious Prime Minister – remind you of anyone? – are class acts. It's also good to hear the young Irish mezzo Rachel Kelly in the *comprimario* role of the minister's sister, Anagilda.

Keri-Lynn Wilson – or Mrs Peter Gelb as one's probably not allowed to call her – is an experienced conductor who has worked in

leading houses across the world, including the Royal Opera House (a recent *Carmen*) and the London Coliseum, where her conducting of *Aida* was admired. Here the drive and authority of her conducting work wonders for the piece. I like the way she rescues the Overture (reused by Rossini in revised form for *Otello* in Naples in 1816) from *buffo* banality by giving it a rumbustious, even dangerous feel. I also like the way the performance culminates in an electrifying account of the Act 2 quartet. Identifying and realising any work's one true climax is a skill that eludes all too many stick-wavers.

Rossini wrote *Sigismondo* for Venice's Teatro La Fenice in the autumn of 1814. He was 22 and on the cusp of a move to Naples and the second great phase of his career. The impresario of La Fenice warned him that the libretto wasn't up to much and Rossini seems to have agreed. Still, he set to and came up with some vital and at times forward-looking music that had the singular merit of appeasing the first-night audience.

Which is why it doesn't perhaps matter that BR-Klassik has been negligent in its presentation – no text and translation, such as one has with Bongiovanni's highly recommendable 1992 Rovigo theatre recording conducted by Richard Bonyng, nor the kind of track-by-track synopsis such as Naxos provides in its altogether less well-sung and less efficiently recorded 2016 Rossini in Wildbad performance.

Put on the discs, forget the plot and enjoy the music would be my advice. True, no self-respecting *Gramophone* subscriber would wish to morph into a vacuous-minded dilettante. But Rossini would have understood your problem and – dare I say it? – recognised your pain.

Richard Osborne

Comparative versions:

Fogliani (9/17) (NAXO) 8 660403/4

Bonyng (BONG) GB2131/2

Salieri

La fiera di Venezia

Francesca Lombardi Mazzulli *sop*..... Falsirena

Krystian Adam *ten*..... Ostrogoto

Natalia Rubis *sop*..... Cristallina

Dilyara Idrisova *sop*..... Calloandra

Furio Zanasi *bar*..... Grifagno

Giorgio Caoduro *bar*..... Belfusto

Emanuele d'Aguanno *ten*..... Rasoio

L'Arte del Mondo / Werner Ehrhardt

Deutsche Harmonia Mundi ⑤ ② 19075 96456-2

(143' • DDD)

Recorded live at Erholungshaus, Leverkusen, Germany, October 31 – November 4, 2018

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



La fiera di Venezia – 'The fair of Venice' – is quite different from the operas that Salieri

composed for Paris and Versailles in the 1780s (don't miss *Tarare* – *Aparté*, 8/19). It's a comedy: a hit when it was premiered in Vienna in 1772, it was taken up all over Europe. The setting is not, as you might expect, the Venice Carnival, but the Ascension Day Festival, when the Doge was symbolically wedded to the sea. The story is centred on the hapless duke Ostrogoto, whose pursuit of Falsirena is upset by the unexpected arrival of his fiancée, Calloandra. Falsirena leads him on, though her affections are really for Belfusto, a man of her own class – to whom, nevertheless, she gives a hard time. The third couple is Cristallina, a market trader, and Rasoio, the innkeeper; the cast is completed by Grifagno, the father of Falsirena.

Much of the action hangs on the characters being masked, or otherwise disguised. Falsirena turns up as an opera singer, a French saleswoman and a German baroness. As well as causing confusion to the aristocratic couple, this gives Salieri

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the opportunity for parody: 'Aci, ben mio' is a pastoral duet for Acis and Galatea, 'Rabbia, bile, affanno' is a 'rage' aria, while the terzetto in the next act is a German dance. Later on, the libretto pokes gentle fun at the conventions of *opera seria* when Ostrogoto compares himself to a helmsman who forgets the storm when he sees his reflection in the tranquil sea.

Salieri sets the scene with the bustling traders in the Piazza, before the story gets going. The music made a keen impression on Mozart. He wrote a set of variations on 'Mio caro Adone' from Act 2 (K173c); more significantly, in Belfusto's arias, especially 'Oh donne, donne, a diverla', we can hear an anticipation of Guglielmo's 'Donne mie, la fate a tanti' in *Così fan tutte*. And I would guess that Calloandra's 'Vi sono sposa', with its flute and oboe obbligatos, is an even more likely inspiration for Konstanze's 'Martern aller Arten' in *Die Entführung* than another possible candidate, an aria from JC Bach's *La clemenza di Scipione* (London, 1778).

Salieri's coloratura aria, in Mozart's C major and complete with cadenza, is admirably sung by Dilyara Idrisova. It's a serious piece, and not the only one. 'Il pargoletto amabile' is a lyrical number addressed to Falsirena by Ostrogoto, which Krystian Adam sings with great tenderness. The live recording is based on a stage production at the Schwetzingen Festival: the sopranos sometimes sound shrill and the horns can be over-prominent, but this is not too serious. There is, however, one drawback. The recitatives are ruined by the antics of the fortepiano player, whose scales, arpeggios and general hyperactivity suggest that he has been listening to Teodor Currentzis's recordings of the Mozart/da Ponte comedies – not a good model. Even worse, he indulges in jokey, anachronistic references: I noted the Marseillaise, Haydn's Austrian national anthem, *Für Elise* and the Brindisi from *La traviata*; no doubt there are others. Fortunately, you can program the recitatives out, and I strongly advise you to do so. Otherwise, the 21-year-old composer (over 30 operas were to follow) is well served by Werner Ehrhardt and L'Arte del Mondo. **Richard Lawrence**

Spontini

Le metamorfosi di Pasquale

Baurzhan Anderzhanov *bass-bar* Pasquale
Carlo Feola *bass-bar* Barone
Michela Antenucci *sop* Costanza
Daniele Adriani *ten* Cavalier/Sergeant
Carolina Lippo *sop* Lisetta
Antonio Garés *ten* Marquis
Davide Bartolucci *bar* Frontino

G Rossini Symphony Orchestra /

Giuseppe Montesano

Dynamic ⑤ ② CDS7836 (84' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Teatro GB Pergolesi, Iesi, September 22, 2018

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



Some great operas received disastrous premieres: *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, where the audience hissed and jeered and a cat wandered on-stage and had to be booted into the wings; *Madama Butterfly*, where Rosina Storchio's kimono billowed out and the audience shouted 'Butterfly is pregnant!'; and *Carmen*, where a passionate gypsy seducing a soldier was clearly too salacious for the Opéra-Comique audience. Gaspare Spontini's *Le metamorfosi di Pasquale* didn't suffer a first-night disaster as such, but its reception at Venice's Giustiniani in San Moisè on January 16, 1802, was distinctly lukewarm and it was withdrawn just six days later. *Barbiere*, *Butterfly* and *Carmen* are great works; *Le metamorfosi di Pasquale* is decidedly not.

Spontini's final opera for an Italian theatre, *Pasquale* is a *farsa giocosa per musica* set to a libretto by Guiseppe Foppa, who later wrote Venetian farces for Rossini. Being a farce, it has a convoluted plot involving thwarted love. Its central ruse concerns Pasquale, the adventurer of the title, who returns home to search for his beloved and, while taking a nap under a tree, has his coat exchanged by a fleeing marquis who hopes to evade capture. Pasquale takes advantage of his new title and good fortune with typically tangled consequences that needn't detain us here.

Like many of Dynamic's operatic recordings, this one was caught in performance at a provincial Italian opera house with all the hazards that entails, including stage noise and less than ideal orchestral playing in a boxy acoustic. This one was made at the Teatro Comunale Pergolesi in Iesi, performed at the 18th Pergolesi Spontini Festival. Much of the playing and singing is pretty routine, but that also goes for the score itself. The Overture, scrappily played under Giuseppe Montesano, is the most banal, repetitive stuff I've heard in a long time.

Bass Baurzhan Anderzhanov is a firm-voiced Pasquale, making the most of his Figaro-like entrance aria. Carolina Lippo is characterful and agile as Lisetta, the maid Pasquale loves, although her top is pushed in her virtuoso aria. The Spanish

tenor Antonio Garés makes heavy weather of the Marchese's 'Sol per te, mio diletto tesoro'.

The accompanying booklet includes a full libretto and many scholarly notes about how the opera was reconstructed. I wish their efforts had been worth it. Unless you're a Spontini completist, this is not required listening. **Mark Pullinger**

Stanford

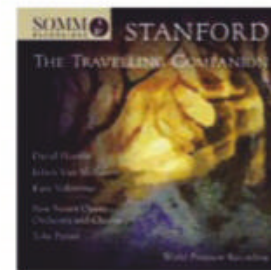
The Travelling Companion

David Horton *ten* John
Julien Van Mellaerts *bar* The Travelling Companion
Kate Valentine *sop* The Princess
Pauls Putnins *bass-bar* The King
Ian Beadle *bar* The Wizard/Ruffian
Felix Kemp *bar* The Herald/Ruffian
Tamzin Barnett, Lucy Urquhart *sops* Two Girls
New Sussex Opera Chorus and Orchestra /
Toby Purser

Somm Céleste ⑤ ② SOMMCD274-2 (124' • DDD)

Recorded live at Saffron Hall, Saffron Walden, Essex, December 2, 2018

Includes synopsis and libretto



This is a landmark: the first full-length commercial recording of any of Stanford's nine completed operas. It's all the more remarkable in having been brought about by the semi-professional New Sussex Opera, who last year revived *The Travelling Companion* for the first time in decades. It should be said at the outset that with a fine professional cast, and generally proficient, idiomatic orchestral playing under the conductor Toby Purser, it's a very decent recorded operatic debut for Stanford, and enthusiasts – and the curious – are unlikely to be disappointed.

And it's well overdue. Stanford was no operatic also-ran; his earliest operas were performed in Germany and his comedy *Shamus O'Brien* toured successfully across the UK at the turn of the century. *The Travelling Companion*, dating from 1916, is his last opera and, according to Jeremy Dibble's booklet notes, it's his masterpiece – a statement which few living individuals are in a position to contradict. It's a fairy-tale opera, based on Hans Christian Andersen. A princess under a malevolent enchantment tests her suitors, Turandot-like, with a deadly riddle. But after an act of kindness, the opera's wandering hero John acquires an otherworldly Travelling Companion, who decapitates the wizard responsible and breaks the curse with a cry of 'God save us all from goblins!'

That's probably the weakest line in Henry Newbolt's libretto; elsewhere, Newbolt gives Stanford an effective framework to do what he does best: spinning lyrical, luminous melody, interspersed with highly effective choral writing and lit by the occasional flash of orchestral magic. No one goes to Stanford for shock value, and it's a gentle, often wistful score: Stanford's watercolour Wagnerism and Mendelssohn-like woodwind-writing are no match for the story's occult and erotic aspects. Perhaps, amid the unfolding tragedy of 1916, it was the idea of friendship beyond the grave that spoke most deeply to the 64-year-old composer; certainly the scenes for John and the Companion are the most affecting. Their last farewell is deeply touching: you can hear why Tippett rated this opera so highly.

David Horton is an ardent, youthful-sounding John. Julien Van Mellaerts as the Companion is slightly cooler in expression, but both can carry a melodic line and the two play beautifully off each other. Kate Valentine's rich-toned, ardent Princess sounds splendid, too, against Ian Beadle's Wizard: a ringing, pleasingly dark reading of a role that could easily slip into pantomime. Everyone here is entirely committed, though the enthusiastic amateur chorus, with its infectiously catchy 'Morning Glory' refrain, is distinctly hit-and-miss, and the orchestra, too, nearly comes unstuck in the demonic Act 3 interludes.

That this matters so little is down once more to the conductor Toby Purser, who sounds like he's been conducting Stanford operas for decades, so eloquent is his phrasing, and so naturally does he let the music blossom and soar. A full libretto is included and this recording – a true labour of love – should whet a lot of appetites. Anyone for *Shamus O'Brien*?

Richard Bratby

Verdi

Attila – Uldino! ... Mentre gonfiarsi l'anima ... Raccapriccio! ... Oltre quel limite t'attendo
Don Carlo – Ella giammai m'amò! ... Dormiro sol nel manto mio regal **Ernani** – Che mai vegg'io! ... Infelice! E tuo credevi ... Infin che un brando vindice **Luisa Miller** – Che mai narrasti! ... Il mio sangue, la vita darei **Macbeth** – Studia il passo, o mio figlio ... Come dal ciel precipita **Nabucco** – Sperate, o Figli! ... D'Egitto là sui lidi! Vieni, o Levita! ... Tu sul labbro de' veggenti! **Oberto** – Ei tarda ancor! ... L'orror del tradimento ... Ma tu, superbo giovane **Simon Boccanegra** – A te l'estremo addio, palagio altero ... Il lacerato spirito **I vespri siciliani** – O patria, o cara patria ... O tu, Palermo

Ildar Abdrazakov *bass* **Rolando Villazón** *tenor*
Montreal Metropolitan Chorus and Orchestra / Yannick Nézet-Séguin

DG 483 6096GH (71' • DDD)

Digital download includes 'Elle ne m'aime pas!' and 'Je dormirai dans mon manteau royal' from *Don Carlos*

Includes texts and translations



Albums devoted to the bass voice aren't all that common, fewer yet a bass recital

devoted to one composer. The Russian singer Ildar Abdrazakov has certainly gone all out in this collection, with music drawn from all over Verdi's operas, mixing early rarities (*Oberto*, *Ernani*) with classic bass arias and scenes (*Simon Boccanegra*, *Don Carlo*).

The expectation of a black-hued, cavernous bass sound – à la Abdrazakov's great compatriot Boris Christoff – is confounded early on. A signature lead role for Abdrazakov, Attila, is first up: his recounting of the terrible vision that warns of the warlord's downfall to Rolando Villazón's Uldino, the first of two unexpected cameos by the Mexican tenor, a DG stablemate. And, instead, it reveals the vitality, smoothness and walnut-toned mellowness of Abdrazakov's voice. With it comes an extra layer of vulnerability to the character, if not the undertow of menace that surely history's 'scourge of God' should have.

Once Abdrazakov has established this tone, it is pretty much set throughout. Philip II's monologue from *Don Carlo* is the highlight, for the intimate confession of a desperate monarch suits the singer's warmth of tone and the sense of inner struggle is palpable. There's also a dreamy cello obbligato from the principal player in the Orchestre Métropolitain de Montréal, which is conducted by Yannick Nézet-Séguin with great flair. The Canadian orchestra's strings are vibrant and gutsy, and Nézet-Séguin pounces on some orchestral details with swagger and charm – the gambolling winds introducing Procida's 'O tu, Palermo' from *I vespri siciliani*, or the glitter and pomp of the cabaletta to Silva's 'Infelice! E tuo credevi' from *Ernani*. In doing so sometimes he steals the show.

Abdrazakov shows off plenty of Verdian skills throughout – smooth phrasing, elegant diction – although there are a few top notes that sound short of trumpety ring. What's missing is variety, and if the thematic monotony of

the album contributes to this (couldn't we have had a duet to break the flow, such as Philip and the Grand Inquisitor from *Don Carlos*?), so does the singer's tendency to restrain big emotions, big expressive gestures. If you're in a supporting role, that's a curious instinct, and it leaves his Zaccaria (*Nabucco*) a little short of holy zeal, his Fiesco (*Simon Boccanegra*) more sorrowful than embittered. Still, it would be churlish to deny his limpid artistry; and if there is filler here, you're buoyed along by a full-throttle orchestra.

Neil Fisher

Weber

Euryanthe

Jacquelyn Wagner *sop.* Euryanthe

Theresa Kronthaler *mez.* Eglantine

Norman Reinhardt *ten.* Adolar

Andrew Foster-Williams *bass-bar.* Lysiart

Stefan Cerny *bass.* Ludwig VI

Arnold Schoenberg Choir; ORF Vienna Radio

Symphony Orchestra / Constantin Trinks

Capriccio ② C5373 (162' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Theater an der Wien, Vienna,

December 11, 12 & 15, 2018

Includes synopsis and German libretto

Weber

Euryanthe

Joan Sutherland *sop.* Euryanthe

Marianne Schech *sop.* Eglantine

Frans Vroons *ten.* Adolar

Lloyd Strauss-Smith *ten.* Rudolf

Otakar Kraus *bar.* Lysiart

Kurt Böhme *bass.* Ludwig VI

Beryl Hatt *sop.* Bertha

BBC Chorus and Symphony Orchestra /

Fritz Stiedry

Nimbus Prima Voce ② NI7969 (138' • ADD)

BBC studio recording, broadcast September 30,

1955, from the Itter Broadcast Collection

Includes synopsis



Reviews of Weber's follow-up to *Der Freischütz* tend to begin with the listener, enchanted all over again by the score's magic, depth and pace, holding up his hands in protest at the work's still serious neglect. Helmina von Chézy's libretto is regularly slated for both its verbal weaknesses and its reliance on over-melodramatic events to link up the plot. Yet those actually involved in working on *Euryanthe* in performance have often leapt to von Chézy's defence: from Mahler in Vienna (although he



Eye-poppingly colourful: a 2015 production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* from Verona acts as a tribute to the late Franco Zeffirelli – see review on page 97

made some retouchings of his own) to Christof Loy (also in Vienna), stage director of the recent production from which this new recording is taken.

Weber's dramaturgical use of his music is understandably advanced as a stick with which to beat the later, but parallel, fantasy-novel atmosphere of Wagner's *Lohengrin*. One could imagine a counterfactual visit to his successor's opera by Weber, perceiving with gimlet-eyed clarity where to make improvements. A big one of these is surely the baddies' plot where Weber's Lysiart and Eglantine – sketched with greater economy but more venom than Wagner's Telramund and Ortrud – are given (in Act 2) one of the most frightening vengeance duets in 19th-century Romantic opera, musically a straight arrow from *Fidelio* to *Götterdämmerung*. And their individual monologues of distress and resentment (Acts 2 and 3) do not come far behind in the imaginative stretching of convention.

The chorus also (like *Lohengrin*'s in an almost constant state of shock and awe) never outstays its welcome, although it is involved in the only cut here, around the aborted Act 3 wedding of the villains, a

snip almost as incomprehensible as those still applied to *Lohengrin* in Bayreuth. It also means that the soubrette role of the peasant Bertha is not heard, although her music in Act 3, taken over by the chorus, is. Neither of these changes, nor the loss of the small-part knight Rudolf, has been communicated to the booklet editors.

If you want 100 per cent of the score (which I suspect carries many musicological or, at least, textual problems) you still have EMI's (now Berlin Classics') Dresden recording under Janowski, a little obviously off the book for the microphones but a thoroughly professional result. But I would now put this new performance first. Trinks handles the score with great drive and a good sense of scale for a modern-instrument band. As for the cast, there may be more famous names elsewhere but few identify with and project their characters as strongly through the Weber/von Chézy text. Reinhardt is as ideally toned a hero as Foster-Williams is a black unmelodramatic villain. Kronthaler is especially clear in her frustrations and Wagner shining and radiant where necessary but never merely pretty.

It's rather bad luck that this precise moment was chosen to relaunch Nimbus's takeover of a 1955 BBC broadcast (see A/05 for *Gramophone*'s first review of it). For, despite big cuts (including around 20 minutes' worth of Act 3), this is a well-prepared performance of considerable merits. Not the least of these is the proof that Joan Sutherland could indeed have made a serious career in the dramatic German *Fach*: she sounds an outstandingly fluent and natural exponent of the title-role. Conductor Fritz Stiedry's preserved Wagner performances are often a little spotty but here he seems in well-ordered control of everything. All the other major roles are on committed top form. But it's now rather a case of 'if this were the only recording ...'.

The new Capriccio *Euryanthe* is recommended as the best performance on disc now available *pace* those minor cuts. The reissued Nimbus performance, however, is in no way de-recommended and, in more than reasonable sound, is essential for students and fans of Dame Joan Sutherland's work.

Mike Ashman

Selected comparison:

Janowski (10/75^R, 7/86^R) (BERL) 0011082BC

As part of the **20th anniversary celebrations** in 2019, Songlines has produced a special one-off publication looking at the most iconic moments in world music from 1999-2019. Featuring content spanning all **150 issues** of Songlines magazine, including details of the top album releases, artist news and main events from each year plus the results of the Songlines readers' cover poll.



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The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

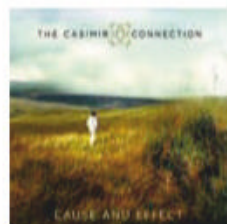
Jazz

Brought to you by **jazzwise**

The Casimir Connection

Cause And Effect

Ciconia © 1910CD



I do like a good liner note, one that genuinely carries you into the music, and leader/composer/multi-instrumentalist Diane

McLoughlin does the business here.

'There's nothing comparable to feeling rage on a sunny day,' she writes of 'The Storm Inside', which begins with a lovely sunny-side-up theme before giving way to some watch-out-storm-brewing violin scratches and flashes; the resumption, which draws together and resolves the contrasting moods, is beautifully achieved. This is a deeply personal collection of pieces – 'a journey through the influence of childhood experiences' – that has been given persuasively universal form in the

playing of McLoughlin's chamber jazz quartet, which sits poised on the border between jazz, folk and classical: there's Bartók in those rolling hills, Poulenc in those Yorkshire Dales and more than a glimpse of Bulgaria on the horizon in 'Nadya'. Tender, inventive and well worth a listen. **Robert Shore**

Aki Takase

Hokusai - Piano Solo

Intakt © CD327



A long-time stalwart of the European avant-garde scene and long-time partner of Alex von Schlippenbach, Takase is now a senior citizen. At the top of her game pianistically, she has a wide vocabulary capable of many seemingly disparate styles. Perhaps because this 48-minute recital is

partly inspired by the iconic 18th-century visual artist Hokusai, the 12 separate compositions take a considerable variety of approaches, and in most cases a single approach for a single track. The widest contrast perhaps is between the gentle ragtime of 'Sketch Of Spring' (one of two items played on celeste only) and 'Hokusai's Meer' ('Hokusai's Sea') which recalls his famous depiction of *The Great Wave* with a full-on Tayloresque swell. But then there's a piece that sounds like a take-off of unaccompanied Lennie Tristano (called 'Dr. Beat', but dedicated to Schlippenbach) and a two-piano duet with Schlippenbach that's directly based on JS Bach with wild improv on top. The final funky piano riff behind the oriental rapping of Yoko Tawada, joined I think by Takase's voice in its closing moments, is entirely unexpected, but a pleasant surprise. **Brian Priestley**

World Music

Brought to you by **SONGLINES**

Black String

Karma

ACT Music © ACT 9045-2



After Jambinai, Black String are the best known of the intriguing new batch of experimental folk bands from South Korea.

Both groups mix ancient instruments including the *geomungo* (zither) or *yanggeum* (hammered dulcimer) with contemporary influences, guitars and electronica. So what's the difference? Jambinai's latest album *ONDA* matches an extraordinary blitz of sound against gentle, lyrical passages, while *Karma* is a far more measured, at times quietly hypnotic affair. But it's still bravely original.

Karma starts with the gently rhythmic and compelling 'Sureña' and then develops into a selection of tracks that has the

fluidity of a jazz set. No surprise that Ornette Coleman was an inspiration for the final track, 'Blue Shade'. Elsewhere, on 'Elevation of Light' twanging geomungo lines from bandleader Heo Yoon-Jeong give way to a solo work from the Vietnamese guitarist Nguyễn Lê, while on the gently drifting 'Exit Music – For a Film', the Radiohead song is re-worked for geomungo and guitar. And the title-track is a gently compelling blend of ancient instruments and electronica. **Robin Denselow**

Llio Rhydderch

Sir Fôn Bach

Fflach © CD370H



Llio Rhydderch was moved to arrange 'Anhawdd Ymadael', the penultimate tune of this very beautiful album,

because the elegy 'Marwnad Dafydd ap Huw, Berach' was possibly sung to it. Dafydd ap Huw died in 1696 and Rhydderch is one of his descendants. The triple harp tradition she has inherited is indeed centuries old, and a rich one. *Sir Fôn Bach* is a collection of tunes reflecting different periods of Rhydderch's life – the Welsh ballads and folk songs she heard in childhood, the *cynghanedd* (strict metre poetry) and old manuscripts she has researched recently, such as the fiddler Morris Edwards' tune-book (dated 1778) in which she found the sprightly 'Consét y Pipar Coch'.

Rhydderch learned by ear, teaches in the same way and is admired for her ability to improvise. She acknowledges the influence of the musicians from foreign lands with whom she has toured and recorded. Anyone who enjoys the *kora* music of the griots will appreciate *Sir Fôn Bach*. **Julian May**

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REISSUES & ARCHIVE

Our monthly guide to the most exciting catalogue releases, historic issues and box-sets

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Bruckner from Berlin and Vienna

Peter Quantrill compares symphony cycles – one from Vienna, the other from Berlin

Here is a tale of two cities, and two record companies. The story opens with the Ninth Symphony in May 1965 in Vienna, with the debut on record of the 29-year-old Zubin Mehta, who had only lately completed his studies at the city's conservatoire. The circle turns with the First, recorded in January 1981 by the Berlin Philharmonic and the 72-year-old Herbert von Karajan, who had never previously conducted the symphony and would never do so again.

Karajan's belated acquaintance with the First was made in order to complete a survey for DG begun with the Eighth just six years earlier – a brief span in Brucknerian terms. Mehta's Ninth, on the other hand, initiated a cycle never intended as such. Decca gathered them for a 65-disc 'Wiener Philharmoniker: The Orchestral Edition' (12/14), but it took the label's Japanese arm to conceive of a **Vienna Philharmonic Bruckner cycle** – a neat reversal of the conceit that saw Rafael Kubelík recording Beethoven's symphonies with nine different orchestras – and now the Australian-based Eloquence imprint to release the set internationally.

As well as capitalising on the hungry local market for great slabs of Austro-German symphonic beef, the Japanese were on to something. Single-conductor symphonic cycles by their nature make for an enterprise of uneven artistic success. For all that an attitude tenaciously persists of Bruckner writing the same symphony nine times (among those unaware of the two early 'study' symphonies, at any rate), there is no reason why a conductor at home in the endless melody and largely serene progress of the Seventh should make an equally strong case for the bold juxtapositions and severe counterpoint of the Fifth.

Orchestras, however, do not enjoy such luxury of choice. And for all their sometimes infuriatingly quixotic



inclinations (off one night, on the next), the Vienna Philharmonic musicians own a Bruckner tradition second to none, having long repented the disdain their forebears showed to Bruckner during his lifetime. No one who heard Bernard Haitink make his adieu from the podium this summer in the Seventh, which the Viennese played in Salzburg, London and Lucerne, will likely forget the occasion, or believe other than that they heard an ideal match of music and musicians.

What the Eloquence set confirms, however, is that the 'Vienna Philharmonic sound' of the 1960s and '70s belongs as much to Decca and its teams of engineers as it does to the orchestra. We might expect the Seventh and Eighth to be loaded in favour of the brass under the baton of Sir Georg Solti ('He either ignores or subdues the woodwinds' was a blunt, not entirely cockeyed, perspective from the principal flute of the Chicago SO in 1974). But the same is true of the Second and Sixth under Horst Stein – by the early 1970s a regular conductor at Bayreuth, experienced with orchestral balances where the brass need no encouragement – as well as Mehta's Ninth, where principal themes are not so much outlined as scored with red felt tip. The rest of the band might as well



have packed up and gone home early in the coda of the Fifth under Lorin Maazel.

Was this simply the 'Bruckner sound' of the era? Not so, as a brief sample of Haitink's contemporary Philips recordings will confirm. But it was a full-throttle, not especially subtle sound world that grabbed listeners by the throat in the music of a composer who, in the UK and the US at that time, audiences were still learning to love, and these recordings sold him to them. Of the six conductors on the Decca set, only Karl Böhm (in Nos 3 and 4) and Mehta's contemporary and fellow student Claudio Abbado (No 1) keep the brass in check and integrate them within an orchestral body somewhat recognisable to us now, at a time when instant impact is prized less than the scrupulous contour of each line and every note, whether or not the composer expected them to be heard and held up for inspection.

The music of Stravinsky and Schoenberg as well as the rediscovery of older playing styles for Bach and Handel and the refinement of recording technology had already begun to effect a steady evolution on performances of Mozart and Beethoven, but their mark on Bruckner's music would not be felt for another couple of decades. Sceptics in the matter are pointed towards



The Berlin Bruckner set is exclusively conducted by Karajan: was the conductor moulding Bruckner in his own image?

Maazel's final recording of the Fifth, made live in 1999 with the Bavarian RSO (2/11). Slower still than in Vienna, the peroration may drag itself towards an even more self-conscious blaze of glory, but it does so with perhaps twice as many of Bruckner's notes actually audible.

Where the Decca sound comes into its own (at least to this pair of 21st-century ears) is paradoxically outside those *fortissimo tuttis* that, in the case of Mehta's Ninth, were commonly used as demonstration samples for hi-fi equipment; rather it is in the prominence of the Viennese oboe that introduces a sour, querulous or rustic note to these recordings – the grit in the oyster of the strings. It is Böhm and Stein who encourage the winds with the surest guiding hand, but then theirs are also the recordings that most successfully outlive the era of their reception.

By contrast, it is the Second and Sixth that find **Karajan** on the most uncomfortable territory. Indeed, the Sixth is a strong candidate for the worst recording he ever made, certainly of Bruckner: stiff and cumbersome in the opening *Maestoso*, straining for pathos in the *Adagio*, by turns sticky, leaden-footed and clamorous in the finale (not that his failure is singular in a notoriously tricky movement). At the time (the dawn of the digital era), he was no more familiar, in practical terms, with the First and the Third, yet the Third especially burns with conviction throughout. He takes his time over the finale's contrasts of high chorale

and low polka, finding more common elements between them than does Böhm, as well as a strain of imminent catastrophe that anticipates the later symphonies and lends a sense of inevitability to the apotheosis otherwise rarely encountered in accounts of the spatchcocked 1889 version of the symphony.

Karajan conducted the Eighth more frequently than any other Bruckner symphony. And with the exception of the Fourth, he invests the slow movements of the earlier symphonies with a weight of expression, anchored by a huge string bass, that would be anachronistic in any age. But the Fourth itself demonstrates the feature that sets apart this cycle from both the Vienna one and indeed any other: Karajan as sorcerer of the studio, and occasionally sorcerer's apprentice. How the Decca engineers would doubtless blanch at the Fourth's Scherzo emerging as an impressionist wash of sound, horns and trumpets almost off stage to begin with. Absolute clarity (or the absence of it) is beside the point here, in search of a realisation of a Romantic narrative for the symphony achieved as much through technological means as at the hands and lips of the Berlin Philharmonic musicians.

Imprecisions of tuning and ensemble go by the board more often than on the Decca set. The heavy velvet robe of the Seventh's *Adagio* brings to mind Karajan's 1971-72 *Tristan* for EMI, a recording once dismissed in these pages as 'calculated and studio-bound' with decidedly pejorative

implications. Are they mere accidents of production? Not likely. Just four years earlier he had recorded the Fourth for EMI with pinpoint articulation in the Scherzo, freshly sprung rhythms and a genial, outdoorsy Trio in the same acoustic of the Philharmonie. The *pianissimo* walking bass to open the Fifth and its finale is accorded a prominence in keeping with its motivic significance, yet impossible to achieve in concert without flouting the score. The sound stage throughout the Fifth is much wider and shallower than it is in the Fourth, laid out more like the west end of a cathedral than a woodland scene from late Titian.


Another object comparison is offered by the first movement of the Ninth (from September 1975),

which begins in Berlin with a hum in the bass like a Buddhist chant, swelling and enveloping as if to usher the listener in to some Parsifalian rite. On All Souls' Day in Vienna three years later (once superbly remastered for CD, 2/92; now on film, 10/08), the string tremolo is pulled into focus as a more implacably pulse-led accompaniment to the main theme on the horns, announcing a performance that harked back to the firebrand Karajan of the 1950s and '60s. By the letter of the score, the live performance is a more conventionally engaging traversal, but a distinct vision of Bruckner takes shape through the course of the studio cycle – more urban, quick-witted and domineering than the mythologised organist of St Florian, to be sure (try the Scherzo of the Fifth), while battling with a tragic muse no less than the Bruckner of Karajan's predecessor Furtwängler. Was Karajan moulding Bruckner in his own image? The notion is not so fanciful, bearing in mind Bernstein's Beethoven or Barbirolli's Elgar, to talk only of late interpreters. When a performer achieves a sense of total identification with a composer, as Karajan did from time to time with Bruckner, the composer finds an unfamiliar home in a new age. **G**

THE RECORDINGS

Bruckner Symphonies Nos 1-9 VPO / Abbado, Böhm, Maazel, Mehta, Solti, Stein

Decca Eloquence © 9 ELQ484 0204

Bruckner Symphonies Nos 1-9 BPO / Karajan
DG © 9 (+ ) 483 7137

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BOX-SET *Round-up*

Rob Cowan offers a personal selection of some worthwhile CD bargains

My first port of call is an unqualified recommendation of the second volume of **Elisabeth Leonskaja's** latest traversal of Schubert piano sonatas: a sequence of earlier works, the playing poised somewhere between Richter's austerity and Gilels's poise. The start of the *Wanderer* Fantasy, although *fortissimo* as marked, is assertive rather than aggressive, and the whole work is played of a piece, rather than piecemeal. Leonskaja's fastidious articulation, with an ability to make legato meld into staccato, is obvious from the off (the Sonata in E, D157), whereas variation in pace and dynamics registers most particularly in the first movement of D537 or in the *Andante molto* of D568. Also included are the Sonatas D279, 459, 557, 566, 575, 625 and 664. 'Personal' is how Joan Chissell described some of Leonskaja's Schubert in these pages many years ago (1993), and little has changed. This eaSonus series includes many earlier Schubert works not featured on previous Leonskaja discs, and Miguel Angel Marín's scholarly accompanying booklet 'A Guide to Discovering Schubert's Sonatas' is an added bonus, as is the handsome, sturdy LP-size presentation. The sound is superb. Need I write more? – save that the equally impressive set of late sonatas is also available on eaSonus (EAS 29300).

Oehms's celebration of **Bertrand de Billy's** tenure as chief conductor of the Vienna RSO is equally impressive, and never more so than in a Schubert Ninth Symphony where all the repeats are played, and where in the first-movement *allegro* de Billy winks teasingly at the *non troppo* marking as if to say, 'Compromise on all the excitement? You're kidding me!' Replete with implied chattering birdsong (woodwind), it's a bracing outdoor sprint, as is the finale. Six Beethoven symphonies are included (Nos 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 8), plus the *Egmont* and *Coriolan* overtures, again with a generous roster of repeats (No 5 includes three – in the first, third and fourth movements). The mood is outgoing, the sense of forceful driving especially noticeable in the Seventh Symphony (where the first two and last two movements are played *attacca*) and in the *Eroica*, whose 'Marcia funebre' has a sense of tragic inevitability. The *Pastoral's* 'storm' is tremendous, whereas the Second and




Eighth Symphonies are expressed in terms of their Classical lineage. Like all of the best conductors, de Billy is at his most impressive when handling key musical transitions, for instance in the *Largo* of Dvořák's *New World* Symphony, from 6'03", where it slows and quietens for the return of the second subject. And there's the important but rarely acknowledged clarinet line behind the strings near the start of the Scherzo. Mahler's Eighth and Brahms's *Rinaldo* have the benefit of tenor Johan Botha on excellent form, and we're also given works by Strauss (*Don Juan* and *Aus Italien*) and Suk (*Fairy Tale*), and as a bonus a popular French miscellany featuring works by Bizet, Debussy, Ravel, Roussel and Fauré. The sound throughout is excellent (Mahler's closing pages sound as if they'll keep crescendoing forever), and viewed as a package, this is a real treat.

The Myaskovsky quartet cycle has rich ingredients to spare, is well recorded and has superb annotation

Orfeo's commendable box of **Rafael Kubelik** recordings with the Bavarian RSO is representative rather than comprehensive, being restricted mostly to symphonies and including as it does Kubelik's pastorally inclined and deeply recreative accounts of Brahms's cycle of four and Smetana's *Má vlast*. The last four Dvořák symphonies visit woodland thickets rather more frequently than do their studio equivalents (No 7 is the highlight), while Bruckner's epic vistas are represented by inspired accounts of the Eighth and Ninth Symphonies. Of various Kubelik Beethoven performances that Orfeo put out over the years, we're given an uplifting *Choral* (recently reissued alongside a superb *Missa solemnis*, which isn't included); and there are works by Bartók, Berlioz, Haydn, Janáček and Hartmann (*Symphonische Hymnen* only – a pity that the rest of the

original disc, featuring *Concerto funebre* and the Concerto for piano, winds and percussion, has been left off, but perhaps there's a second volume in the offing; I do hope so).

Like Hartmann, Myaskovsky managed partially to sidestep the political horrors of his era by opting for internal exile. His 13 string quartets are in many respects more immediately approachable than his 27 symphonies, making their reappearance in excellent recordings by the **Taneyev Quartet** so welcome. Perhaps the most imposing is No 8 in F sharp minor (1942), a memorial to a friend, though you'd be hard-pressed to find a finer sampling point than the expansive finale of No 9. The First opens with Britten-like hesitancy then switches to a combination of Bartókian grit and gentle lyricism. The cycle has rich ingredients to spare, is well recorded and has superb annotation by Iosif Raitskin.

Finally, just a brief mention that Sony's invaluable **György Ligeti** Edition, including the string quartets, the wonderful Horn Trio and other chamber works, as well as choral, vocal, keyboard and mechanical works and *Le Grand Macabre*, has reappeared as a budget-price Masterworks collection. This is not to be confused with 'The Ligeti Project', which led on from the Sony edition and which is also available (as a five-CD Warner Classics set: 2564 60285-8). Taken together, the two sets offer a synoptic overview of Ligeti's stimulating output. 

THE RECORDINGS

Schubert Complete piano sonatas: early sonatas
Leonskaja eaSonus (E) (4) EAS29342

Bertrand de Billy Botha, Vienna RSO
Oehms (S) (9) OC032

'Rafael Kubelik: the Munich Symphonic Recordings' Orfeo (B) (B) C981115

'Myaskovsky: Complete String Quartets Nos 1-13' Taneyev Quartet
Northern Flowers (S) (5) NF/PMA98005

'György Ligeti: Masterworks' Ehlert, Arditti Qt, Aimard, Chojnacka, Philharmonia / Salonen et al Sony (S) (9) 19075 87792-2

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings



A great tenor & legendary concertmasters

Ernst Haefliger was among the most distinctive tenors of his generation, at once interpretatively probing and pure in tone, which makes **'The Ernst Haefliger Edition'**, released to mark the great Swiss singer's birth centenary, so timely. For many, Haefliger is best remembered for his consistently eloquent contributions to Karl Richter's Munich Bach recordings on DG Archiv (the Passions, the *Magnificat*, various cantatas, and so on), generously represented here in excerpt; and his soulfully impassioned accounts of the tenor songs in Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*. Here his contribution under Eugen Jochum is all we're given, not the whole cycle with mezzo Nan Merriman. Haefliger was quite matchless in this repertoire, especially the first song, 'Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde', with its closing couplet that translates 'Drain your golden goblets to the last. Dark is life, dark is death!' Here Haefliger suggests both yearning and world-weariness. Bruckner's *Te Deum* – here offered complete, again under Jochum – finds Haefliger and soprano Maria Stader on superb form. The highlight among various operatic selections is surely Florestan's scene from Act 2 of Beethoven's *Fidelio* under Ferenc Fricsay, where the emotional tension reaches fever pitch.

Perhaps the most remarkable recording with orchestra features Kodály's *Psalmus hungaricus*, whose text is a paraphrase of Psalm 55. Kodály regarded this particular poem not only as an expression of religious belief, but as a nationalist manifesto. And this 1959 recording is significant on two counts: first, it marked Fricsay's return to the rostrum after one of his worst bouts of illness; secondly, it's taken from the very first German stereo broadcast of a live concert. Fricsay had also conducted it in Munich in 1956, during the suppressed Hungarian uprising, so when at the centre of the work Haefliger angrily declaims the idea of death as a judgement on the enemy you can easily imagine what sort of associations those words must have had for Fricsay – political oppression, nationalist pride and, of course, his own

frail mortality. It's an incredible moment. The various Lieder include a memorable 1969 account of Schubert's *Winterreise* with pianist Michio Kobayashi where Haefliger conjures a disorientating sense of desolation: in 'Die Krähe' (in which an unwelcome companion hints at the protagonist's passing), Haefliger suggests both fright and acceptance; and the following 'Letzte Hoffnung' sounds stunned, utterly disembodied. This is without question a *Winterreise* for modern sensibilities.

Die schöne Müllerin with Jacqueline Bonneau enjoys great purity of utterance. Haefliger's tone is often ethereal, especially in its upper registers, while the excited 'Ungeduld' sounds disarmingly youthful. We're also given *Schwanengesang* and various single Schubert songs, as well as Lieder by Schumann (including *Dichterliebe*), Beethoven (a superb *An die ferne Geliebte* and a couple of first CD releases) and others, plus Janáček's *The Diary of One Who Disappeared* with contralto Kay Griffel and a generously expressive Rafael Kubelík at the piano. In an interesting booklet note, pianist Andreas Haefliger tells us that his father learnt Czech as part of his preparation for this work, 'studied the cycle to the last jot and tittle' – but what we have is a long-familiar German-language recording, which, fine though it undoubtedly is (between them, Haefliger and Kubelík achieve a believable sense of narrative), because it's not in Czech rather compromises the music's full effect. Early music and arias by Handel (including a lovely 'Ombra mai fù' under Richter) and Mozart complete a set – most of which is in stereo – that by any standards warrants the highest possible recommendation. It's a feast of genuine artistry.

Happily, Haefliger lived to a ripe old age. I had the privilege of speaking to him during the period when, in his eighties, he was performing as the speaker in Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder* (including at the 2002 BBC Proms). Another fine musician whose great age allowed reflection

across a long and varied career was Michel Schwalbé, the Polish-born violinist who for almost 30 years (1957-85) led Karajan's BPO. He was an exceptional star-quality concertmaster, his smooth, warmly turned delivery reminiscent of Milstein and Perlman at their best. Melo Classic's **'Legendary Concertmasters of the Berlin Philharmonic'** features a sweet-toned and agile stereo recording of Saint-Saëns's Violin Concerto No 3 under Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt, and equally compelling accounts of Glazunov's Concerto under Mario Rossi, Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole* under Rudolf Michl and Debussy's Violin Sonata with Walter Kamper. Of the various shorter works, Pugnani's *Largo espressivo* (so memorably recorded years earlier by Enescu) truly touches the heart. Elsewhere on this generously filled, well-annotated set are recordings by another fine BPO concertmaster, Hugo Kolberg (20 years older than Schwalbé), whose BPO career both coincided with Schwalbé's (Karajan, 1958-63) and preceded it (Furtwängler, 1934-39). Kolberg's tone was in general less seductive than Schwalbé's – his intonation very occasionally less sure and his repertoire of old-fashioned expressive devices (varieties of shifts, slides, portamento etc) wider. Spohr's Violin Concerto No 9 is quite drily played but very musical; and among the genre pieces here, Kreisler's unaccompanied *Recitativo und Scherzo-Caprice* proves Kolberg's mettle as a virtuoso. Considering that the recordings on this set date from 1952-65, the sound quality is remarkably good.

THE RECORDINGS



'The Ernst Haefliger Edition'
Haefliger *ten* Stader *sop*
Kobayashi *pf* Fricsay, Jochum,
Richter *conds* et al
DG © 12 483 7122



'Legendary Concertmasters of the Berlin Philharmonic'
Kolberg, Schwalbé *vns* Kamper
pf Michl, Rossi *conds* et al
Melo Classic © 2 MC2039



Fistoulari coaxes fine playing from the New Symphony Orchestra in ballet music by Minkus and Weber/Berlioz

Krips's inspired Mahler

Josef Krips's reputation as a conductor of Mahler is scantily represented on disc, but a newcomer from Cameo Classics featuring the LSO in 1957 is significant. I doubt that many listeners would guess that the usually urbane Krips is at the helm if the main climax of the first movement of Mahler's Fourth Symphony were beamed up: the drama is intense, and the crescendo imposing. In general, Krips's approach to the first movement suggests a genial, Mozartian jogtrot, pretty weighty but very much on the level, in terms of tempo, with themes expressively shaped. The second movement's middle section has an affecting Mahlerian glow to it, but even that cannot prepare you for the most glorious *adagio* imaginable in the third movement, its string phrases drawn out along *bel canto* lines, its broad pace allowing for a truly magical atmosphere. In my experience, only Szell, Walter and Mengelberg are as affecting. OK, there's some less-than-perfect playing here and there among the winds and brass, though not in the *adagio* and in any case not enough to spoil the effect of Krips's often inspired interpretation. Soprano Suzanne Danco captures the finale's childlike essence with singing that is both emotionally charged and disarmingly pretty. The mono sound has a surprisingly wide dynamic range. Incidentally, readers who'd like to sample Krips's artistry from a wider perspective may wish to invest in a recently released budget 10-CD collection featuring works by Beethoven, Brahms, Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, Schumann and Tchaikovsky (Profil PH18077).

THE RECORDING



Mahler Symphony No 4
Danco sop LSO / Krips
Cameo Classics (M) CC9112

Ballet music under Irving

Staying with the LSO in the 1950s, Robert Irving's LP coupling of Massenet's *Le Cid* ballet music and Meyerbeer's *Les patineurs* as arranged by Lambert has always been the preferred option for those who found Decca's brilliant stereo remake with the Israel PO under Jean Martinon excessively 'in your face'. The playing is pointed and precise, the feel of both performances authentically balletic. Irving in his prime was an extremely capable conductor (his recording of Glazunov's *The Seasons* is both delicate and vivacious), and this Eloquence double-disc set featuring the New Symphony and London Symphony orchestras is happily representative. The Massenet-Meyerbeer sequence is preceded on disc 1 by ballet suites made up of music by Gluck (arranged by Felix Mottl) and Grétry (Lambert) which although not quite in the Beecham class for expressive refinement are extremely well played and captured in good mono sound. However, for many, the principal draw of this desirable release will be the all-British second CD, which opens with Lambert's piquantly scored (and thematically memorable) *Horoscope* ballet suite, then proceeds to both *Faça* suites (Walton) and ends with *The Lady and the Fool* ballet suite with music by Verdi arranged by Sir Charles Mackerras, a sort of *gaité italienne*.

Here, as elsewhere, the playing is all that one could wish for and shows both orchestras in their best light. The transfers are excellent. Can Warner be persuaded to follow on with an Icon box of their Irving recordings?

THE RECORDING



**'Robert Irving:
The Decca Recordings'**
LSO; New SO / Irving
Decca Eloquence (S) (2)
482 7289

Fistoulari in ballet music

Eloquence has already done another fine Decca ballet maestro proud – Anatole Fistoulari, whose abridged mono recordings of the Tchaikovsky ballets appeared recently. Now Guild has taken on his cause, treating us to a generous cross-section of his recordings from the early 1950s (some of it already available on Decca Eloquence), featuring the Paris Conservatoire Orchestra as well as the LSO and the New Symphony Orchestra. The programme opens with a terrific French performance of Gounod's *Faust* ballet music (try the 'Danse antique' on track 3) then follows on with Thomas's *Mignon* Overture, also from Paris, a performance that can rarely have been matched for the affecting way the slow opening is phrased or the sheer style and bravura of the faster music later on. There's an equally memorable and cumulatively exciting account of Ponchielli's 'Dance of the Hours', its various sections dovetailing effortlessly, the playing consistently fresh. The final Paris recording is a brief run of extracts from *Sleeping Beauty* (including the 'Bluebird' *pas de quatre* that Stravinsky arranged so effectively), whereas *Swan Lake* excerpts are played by the LSO. Both are pretty good, though Fistoulari would go on to re-record superior stereo versions of extracts from both ballets with the LSO (Philips) and the Concertgebouw Orchestra (Decca) respectively. The New Symphony Orchestra items are particularly enjoyable, the *pas de deux* from Minkus's ballet *Don Quixote* gracefully played, and the Weber-Berlioz *Invitation to the Dance* featuring especially fine playing from the strings and woodwind. There are no problems with the transfers, which truthfully capture the sound of the originals.

THE RECORDING



**'Anatole Fistoulari:
A Night at the Ballet'**
LSO; New SO; Paris Cons Orch /
Fistoulari
Guild (M) GHCD3502

Classics RECONSIDERED



Richard Whitehouse and **David Threasher** revisit the Zehetmair Quartet's 2001 recording of Schumann's First and Third String Quartets on ECM New Series



Schumann

String Quartets Nos 1 and 3

Zehetmair Quartet

ECM New Series

Schumann wrote his three quartets in rapid succession during the summer of 1842 but of the two works presented on this CD the Third is the more graceful and assured, the first movement especially. The second movement is a Beethovenian set of variations that opens *assai agitato*, captured here with a nervous, distracted air, as if saying 'don't bother me now – I'm beside myself with worry'. Of the Zehetmair's rivals, the Lark Quartet approximate this visionary unease more readily than the opulent St Lawrence Quartet, who, while

playing beautifully, sound too cosy, too conventionally 'romantic' by comparison.

In the less consistent but more challenging First Quartet, the Hagens on DG come closer still, though even they lack the Zehetmair's tigerish attack and ease of gesture. Minute variations in pulse and emphasis are consistently engaging, and by that I mean maximum freedom within the law of the page. Contrapuntal passages that other quartets present as dry or self-conscious – at 2'36" into the first movement of No 1, for example, where the viola takes the initial lead – assume new-found meaning. Indeed, I was often reminded of Alfred Cortot in Schumann's piano music and Adolf Busch in his First

Violin Sonata, both of whom focus the fantasy while keeping tabs on structure, much as the Zehetmair do here.

These are not comfortable performances. They pass on cosmetic appeal and would rather grate and rail than pander to surface 'gloss'. So be warned. But they are profoundly beautiful in their truthful appropriation of music that can be both poignant and aggressive. Delicate, too, in places (Mendelssohn with added fibre); in fact more comprehensive as musical statements than most of us had previously suspected. That realisation is due almost entirely to the persuasive powers of these supremely accomplished, and realistically recorded, performances. **Rob Cowan (6/03)**

Richard Whitehouse I remember there being surprise when this disc won not only the Chamber category but was also made Recording of the Year at the *Gramophone* Awards in 2003. Not that anyone doubted the quality of either the music or the Zehetmair Quartet's readings, but Schumann's string quartets were not considered high-profile works. In retrospect, maybe this reflected a sea change (still ongoing) in the appreciation and rendition of Schumann's chamber output?

David Threasher Indeed, there's been something of a revolution this past quarter-century in the way that we perform and hear Schumann, and you could certainly point to this former *Gramophone* Recording of the Year as a prime example of this shift in attitudes. There's a fizz and sparkle to both the playing and the recording, and there's also a great deal of playfulness alongside some very serious and dedicated musicianship. These are not, perhaps,

attributes that might have been applied to Schumann in performance or on record, say, 40 or 50 years ago.

RW Maybe we could provide a degree of context, at this point, by comparing Schumann's Op 41 Quartets with Mendelssohn's Op 44, completed four years earlier. Memory recalls the latter works as being more often heard right through to the 1980s, since when the Schumann has become more often encountered in recital and on disc. Is this just a reflection of the relative rise and fall in their composer's reputations, or might it say something about the intrinsic nature of these pieces and their place within the evolution of the string quartet?

DT We hear so much of an exchange of ideas between the two composers all through their music – the similar moods of their D minor Piano Trios or the Mendelssohnian fairy lightness in the Scherzo of Schumann's Piano Quartet.

But let's not measure their respective popularity solely through their chamber music. Mendelssohn's symphonies have never gone away, in performance or on recordings, whereas Schumann's remain a hard sell. I suppose these things go in cycles whose peaks don't necessarily coincide. In terms of the quartets, Schumann's are riding higher than Mendelssohn at present. If we'd been having this conversation in 1999 or again in 2039, we may well be saying precisely the opposite!

RW Very true. I was thinking, too, about the Mendelssohn quartets' connection to the 'quatuor brillant' tradition with its emphasis on overt virtuosity, even though only in the D major work (Op 44 No 1) is the first violin predominant – whereas Schumann's quartets tend to inhabit a more interior domain recalling late Beethoven and Schubert, hence making them a direct link to Brahms, then Reger and beyond. I really got to know the Schumann through



The Zehetmair Quartet at the time of the recording: (L-R) Thomas Zehetmair, Ruth Killius, Françoise Groben and Matthias Metzger

the recording by the Melos Quartett of Stuttgart, first released in 1988 in harness with the Brahms quartets which – whether or not a conscious decision on this ensemble’s part – certainly encouraged me to think along that trajectory. What was your recorded entry into the Schumann quartets and how do you feel about those interpretations now, not least in relation to the Zehetmair?

DT Actually it was this very recording, when I was still quite young. I suspect I’d paid too much attention as a student and young musician to mentors who regurgitated the old notions about Schumann’s failings as a composer, so this disc was one among quite a few around the time that, for me at least, demonstrated the wrongheadedness of that idea. I suspect that some quartets previously had come around to the Schumann later in their recording career and then taped them to fill a discographical lacuna. Whereas this was the Zehetmair Quartet’s second disc, I think, and the first to tackle core 19th-century repertoire, so to have chosen Schumann rather than Beethoven, Schubert or Brahms seems a pretty bold statement of intent. And we know from his earlier and later career that Thomas Zehetmair holds Schumann very close to his heart.

RW Correct me if I’m wrong, but I don’t believe the Amadeus Quartet recorded Schumann for DG, which rather underlined the peripheral standing of these pieces in the context of the quartet repertoire. That had certainly changed by the time of the

Melos recording, but even they initially came attached to the Brahms as though part of a cause-and-effect sequence (of the Brahms, I reckon only the A minor is equal to any of the Schumann, but that’s another story). From the outset of his career, Zehetmair has been a Schumann advocate – his 1988 account of the Violin Concerto going back to manuscript sources then blazing a trail for subsequent recordings. Nor should his cycle of the symphonies with the Royal Northern Sinfonia be overlooked. What do you feel he has brought to Schumann in artistic terms?

DT It’s clear that this is a composer who’s got down into Zehetmair’s soul. In his original review of the quartets, Rob Cowan contrasts the recording’s ‘visionary unease’ against other ensembles’ conventional romanticism. This quartet lives, as it were, right at the edge of the music, moment by moment and never lapsing into autopilot – RC especially identifies contrapuntal passages in this respect. Coupled with ECM’s sound (Manfred Eicher and Stephan Schellmann), which is artful but never artificial, you get a sense of the sinew of this music through a wider range of moods than is sometimes revealed by other recordings. There’s only one major thing wrong with this disc: the absence of the Second Quartet. I know the Zehetmair have performed it, and the disc comes in at under 50 minutes, so why not the whole trilogy?

RW He and the rest of the quartet aren’t musicians who do things by halves. There

have been some misfires – I recall a Queen Elizabeth Hall performance of Schubert’s final quartet (D887) that came over as not so much calculated as ‘laboratory tested’ – but, overall, you can never fault either their insight or commitment. Yes, the absence of Schumann’s Second Quartet is a pity, especially as this is the lightest and most outward-going of the sequence so a necessary balance to those surrounding it. I heard them play it at Wigmore Hall, when they also gave a stunning account of Karl Amadeus Hartmann’s Second Quartet. That latter piece went unrecorded too, making me wonder if this and the Schumann were

planned for an ECM release which never happened. As for the other two quartets, what are the high points for you?

DT Well it’s clear on this disc that every note, every nuance is calculated, and yet it comes over with such a feeling of naturalness – the art that conceals art, so to speak. You’re struck by the way the fast sections of the opening movements are held back, in terms of dynamics, so the few sudden *fortissimos* really come as a shock, even now. And the way they turn and turn the ratchet in the central convulsions of the First’s *Adagio*. I’m sure in the studio there were sparks flying off Zehetmair’s open E string in the same piece’s Scherzo! And then, as so often in Schumann, the finales bring a sense of easing, of relief almost – as if all the tonal knots have been loosened. These players really make the most of that sense of freedom, so the ultimate feeling is one of completion and satisfaction, however hard-won.

RW I’d substantially agree with that, particularly in the care evident over dynamic shading – which, however fastidious, never sounds at all calculated or contrived. No one hearing these readings could ever dismiss Schumann’s quartets with thoughts of Biedermeier complacency, and that applies equally to this ensemble’s accounts of 19th-century repertoire overall. If we were to find ourselves discussing this music in 10 or even 20 years’ time, I’m sure this disc would still be central to our conversation. Classics ‘reconsidered’? Re-energised, more like! **G**

Books



Nicholas Kenyon welcomes a study of the reception history of Bach:

'Hannah French provides a vivid chronicle of Sir Henry Wood's passion for a composer whom he brought into the mainstream'



David Threasher peruses a rather mixed Haydn encyclopedia:

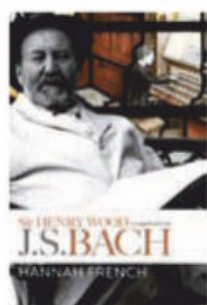
'The biographical essay addresses political, aesthetic and religious aspects of Haydn's outlook that illuminate facets of his character'

Sir Henry Wood: Champion of JS Bach

By Hannah French

The Boydell Press, HB, 353pp, £55

ISBN 978-1-783-27385-0



'An awfully jolly thing by Bach called Brandenburg Concerto, No 3. I find there were six of these, none of

them by Brahms ... The orchestra stood up, like the Hallelujah Chorus, only there it is the audience ... Terrific applause and we tried for an encore ...' To judge from the tone of amused surprise in the semi-fictionalised diary entries of AH Sidgwick's *The Promenade Ticket* (1914), Bach was not a staple diet of the Proms in their early years. But over the period of Henry Wood's long tenure they became an accepted – and then a favourite – part of the season, with popular Bach nights, multiple performances of the *Brandenburgs*, the Suites and the concertos, along with solo cantata arias and orchestral transcriptions of the organ works.

These are all outlined in detail in Hannah French's engaging and meticulous study, which provides a vivid picture of changing public taste as well as a chronicle of Wood's passion for a composer whom he brought into the mainstream. There are many revelations here. Wood was the proponent of massively orchestrated versions of Bach's organ works (the most famous of his own, the Toccata and Fugue in D minor, initially performed under the nom de plume Paul Klenovsky) and of heavily edited orchestral parts full of vivid dynamic markings. So who would have thought that he took an interest in the first years of the 20th century in the historical revivals of Arnold Dolmetsch, let alone have given a lecture-recital on Bach, the fragmentary surviving script of which Hannah French includes here?

For his audience for that talk in Nottingham in 1901, Wood assumes that '999 in a thousand' people would never

have heard of Bach. How that situation changed was largely down to his own persistence and industriousness, which French captures in detail. Her initial conclusion, 'that Bach had become one of the most popular composers in England by the mid-1920s was a direct consequence of Wood's work, particularly at the Proms' (page 28), is possibly overstated, and modified by her later fascinating chapter on 'The Reception of Wood's Bach'. The Proms was at this time a totally orchestral festival (even omitting the last movement of Beethoven's Ninth!) and it is certainly down to Wood's advocacy that Bach's orchestral music entered the mainstream. But the acceptance of the big vocal works has a much longer history in the establishment of the Bach Choir and choral festivals around the country; Wood conducted the Passions for example in Sheffield, but he was building on the work of other pioneers: in my lifetime the standard Novello vocal score of the B minor Mass was still based on the edition by Sir Arthur Sullivan for the Leeds Festival of 1886!

French is excellent in examining the detail of Wood's own Bach arrangements, and here too there is new material from her detailed work in the Wood Archive at the Royal Academy of Music. To the previous compendious list of transcriptions in Arthur Jacobs's fine biography (1994) she adds a seemingly unfinished orchestration of the Fantasia and Fugue in G minor for organ, and prints several versions of cantata arias which show how he went about his work. Wood compiled a Bach Orchestral Suite of his own, mostly from keyboard works, called No 6, which has been revived at the Proms, but I was quite unaware that there is a recording of this under Wood. Its expressive *Andante mistico*, based on the B flat minor Prelude from the '48', is a rather touching period piece.

The climax of Wood's commitment to Bach outside the Proms was surely the fact that he was given one of the very first concerts by the new BBC Symphony Orchestra in the autumn of 1930, directing

all six *Brandenburg Concertos*. Ironically, of course, Wood's espousal of Bach just predated the emergence of the historical performance movement, which in this repertory can be dated to the recordings by the Busch Chamber Orchestra in 1935. After Wood's time, this would sweep all before it with a smaller-scale approach to these masterpieces on both modern and then period instruments. There is thus a melancholy tinge to the end of French's story, particularly in Wood's wartime effort to publish his heavily edited scores of the *Brandenburgs*, which did not quite match the temper of the times, and was left incomplete after his death.

But what a heroic tale this splendidly detailed book tells. Both in its story of Henry Wood's enthusiasm to build a public for great music, and in its story of the changing reception of Bach, it is a fascinating contribution to the emerging history of the early music revival.

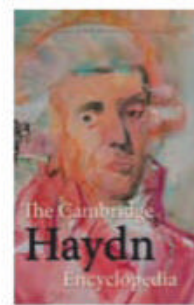
Nicholas Kenyon

The Cambridge Haydn Encyclopedia

Edited by Caryl Clark and Sarah Day-O'Connell

Cambridge University Press, HB, 520pp, £130

ISBN 978-1-107-12901-6



What should we understand by the term 'encyclopedia'?

One handy dictionary describes it as 'a work

containing information on every branch, or a particular branch, of knowledge'. So what might the curious reader wish to learn from such a volume on Haydn? Perhaps how his approach to the symphony developed over a four-decade period of tumultuous change; or how he cultivated the string quartet from the cheerful divertimentos of the early 1760s to the magnificence of the works of the 1790s.

Turn to 'S' and the entries for 'Symphony' or 'String Quartet', however, and the reader finds them missing. The

editors explain that they stipulated ‘no entries on works, individuals or genres’ and direct readers seeking this basic information to other sources, one from the rival Oxford University Press (edited by David Wyn Jones, a contributor here) and one in German. Instead they present over 70 ‘entries’ and seven ‘longer, conceptual essays’. These latter cover the topics of Biography and Identity, Ideas, Institutions, Musical Materials, People and Networks, Performance, and Place.

Wolfgang Fuhrmann is the author of the first of these, taking not a chronological approach to the life but rather addressing political, aesthetic and religious aspects of Haydn’s outlook and identifying instances that illuminate facets of the composer’s character. Emily Doland and Matthew Head take on the second (under the unwieldy title ‘Ideas Haydn and Ideas; Or, The Idea of Haydn’), distinguishing their subject areas, including ‘the Beautiful and Sublime, Time, Exoticism, Politics, and War’, from explicitly musical techniques. Jones himself contributes a characteristically clear-sighted and informative account of the ‘Institutions’ in and with which Haydn worked, covering church and court, concert societies and, ultimately most importantly, publishers.

‘Musical Materials’ (W Dean Sutcliffe) concentrates primarily on the aspects of economy and wit in Haydn’s music and cross-references to ‘Compositional Process’ (Felix Diergarten), which takes two examples – Symphony No 99 and a recitative from *The Creation* – to demonstrate the almost Sibelian manner in which Haydn conceived and shuffled his musical ideas. This is an area of study that, as Diergarten acknowledges, awaits further research; it contrasts with the situation concerning Mozart, for whom scholars such as Ulrich Konrad and Ian Woodfield have contributed major studies of such vividness that the reader is almost transported to the composer’s elbow at the moment of creation. ‘People and Networks’ (Caryl Clark and Ulrich Wilker) amplifies the milieu in which Haydn worked, while ‘Performance’ (Tom Beghin and Elisabeth Le Guin) is a rather playful meditation on the subject by two practitioners. ‘Place’ (Nicholas Mathew) assesses Haydn’s interaction with his physical environment and the effect that his surroundings had on his music.

The shorter entries focus in further on matters raised in the essays and cover more specialised concepts that aren’t. These enable a cross-section of academics to provide a snapshot of the state of Haydn (and, in the broader sense, 18th-century



Sir Henry Wood’s advocacy brought Bach’s orchestral music before a wider public

music) research in our time. Needless to say, some contributions are more successful than others. Perhaps of most direct interest to readers of *Gramophone* is Daniel Barolsky’s entry on ‘Recording’, which, rather than recount the ways in which recordings of Haydn’s music in various genres have proliferated (or not), focuses on theories and analysis of recorded artefacts. A cross-reference is made to ‘Discography’ (Michael Ruhling), which charts correlations between scholarship and recording technologies. Outside of *Gramophone*, there is very little writing on Haydn on records that assesses the subject both historically and qualitatively; and, as the discography grows larger and broader in its range of approaches, such an undertaking remains overdue.

Elsewhere are entries providing background on the political and economic situation in which Haydn grew up, studied and worked, musical concepts such as tonality and counterpoint, and secondary musicological concerns such as iconography and reception. Perhaps entries on ‘Gender’ and ‘Disability’ might appeal primarily to specialists rather than the general reader but useful contributions on subjects such as ‘Catalogues, Worklists, Nachlass’, ‘Correspondence and Notebooks’ or ‘Instruments and Organology’ address matters that apply directly to our own interaction with the composer.

But ‘encyclopedia’? In its range and choice of subjects this volume feels closer, perhaps, to *Mozart in Context* (ed Simon Keefe, reviewed 10/19) than to *The Cambridge Mozart Encyclopedia* (ed Keefe

and Cliff Eisen, reviewed 5/06 by David Vickers, himself co-editor of a parallel volume on Handel). The latter contains entries for, inter alia, all the operas and a comprehensive collection of people with whom Mozart was associated. *The Cambridge Haydn Encyclopedia* is a smaller book, though, and the editors are clear in outlining the decisions they made on what to cover and what to leave out.

The Haydn bibliography remains dominated by HC Robbins Landon’s monumental five-volume *Chronicle and Works* (1976–80). In terms of scholarly but accessible life-and-works, however, there is little in English beyond Geiringer (1946) and Landon/Jones (1988). For those requiring a compact introduction to the man and his music, Richard Wigmore’s *Faber Pocket Guide* is ideal – RW’s chapter on the operas is especially recommended as an overview of an overlooked segment of the output – while Vickers’s Naxos guide dwells inevitably less on a study of the works in favour of a compelling basic biography (and many of the points made in Geraint Lewis’s *Gramophone* review of the two – 4/09 – are as pertinent today as they were a decade ago). *The Cambridge Haydn Encyclopedia* has much of value and is eminently user-friendly in terms of navigation, if less so in the academese of much of its language. The Haydn world nevertheless still awaits a contemporary study that condenses biography, musical assessment and contemporary scholarship with the infectious enthusiasm that remains so much the province of the Mozart bookshelf. **David Thresher**

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony

The beauty of this multifaceted work is that it lends itself to multiple interpretations on record, ranging from inconsistent to incandescent, discovers **Rob Cowan**

Tchaikovsky's Fourth is surely the most intimate and possibly the most perfect of his seven completed symphonies. It was written during 1877 and 1878 and famously opens (on *fortissimo* horns and bassoons) to the implied ring of fate, Bizet's *Carmen* and the tragic fortunes of its protagonists having acted as a prompt. Also relevant are a whole host of personal issues, not least the composer's repressed homosexuality, his disastrous marriage and the imagined probability that it would stifle his muse, which of course it didn't. But it's a mighty edifice, the deliriously waltzing first movement described by Hans Keller no less as 'one of the most towering symphonic structures in our whole literature'.

For the Fourth, Tchaikovsky's ability to conjure a self-contained world matched Mahler's parallel aspirations in his Third Symphony: the first movement expressing struggle and eventual closure (Beethoven's Fifth being an obvious influence); the songlike second movement gently nostalgic; the plucked Scherzo suggesting strumming balalaikas and cavorting peasants; and the finale opening like a whirlwind, awash with folk-song motifs, while the looming ring of fate soon becomes a reality. But not for long. Tchaikovsky won't be beaten and the Fourth ends with basses, cellos and timpani delivering us among festive crowds where fate is heroically upstaged and heady celebration wins the day.

The beauty of this multifaceted work is that it will not be nailed to a single interpretative mast; once committed to memory it repeatedly invades your consciousness, differently shaded or nuanced

each time around, which makes a century's worth of recordings – far too many to deal with here comprehensively – such a boon. So here's my personal take on 90 years' worth of recorded Tchaikovsky Fourths.

EARLY MAVERICKS

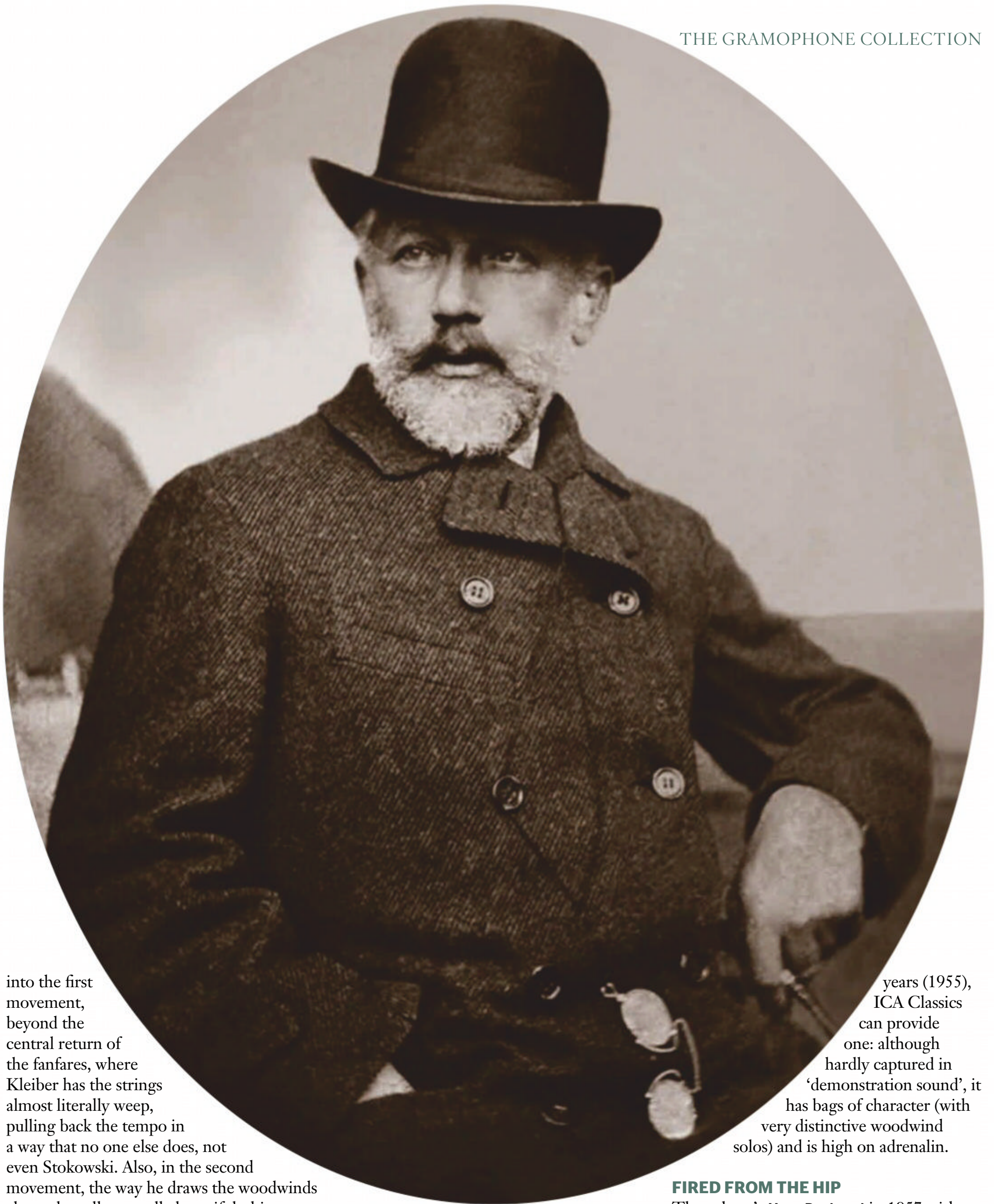
One of the first versions to appear in electrical sound features **Willem Mengelberg** with the Concertgebouw in June 1929, a performance that, while frequently taking issue with the composer's specific directions, is quite simply unique. Few conductors since, not even Furtwängler (Warner), Koussevitzky (see adjacent column) or Beecham (IMG Classics), fine as they undoubtedly are in their very different ways, quite 'got' the Fourth as Mengelberg did – and the sound is pretty amazing for its age. There are, as I've said, idiosyncrasies (the 'revised' close of the first movement and much else besides), but the performance's temple-throbbing effect is down entirely to Mengelberg's ability to turn on the heat at key junctures. Had any other conductor taken the sorts of liberties that Mengelberg does here the effect would probably have been laughable; but none did, and Mengelberg's ability to pull things off carries him shoulder-high. Only Bernstein in 1958 (see page 118) quite approaches this exalted level of subjective interpretation.

As written, at the end of the symphony's first movement the strings play *fff*, desperately forging a bridge to the wild *allegro vivo* conclusion. But what if you create a hiatus in that bridge, as Mengelberg, Pierre Monteux, the composer-conductor **Igor Markevitch** and many others do? The effect is oddly

'cut and dried', though on his 1956 Paris recording (preferable, all told, to his LSO version) Markevitch's dramatic abruptness almost convinces me. Markevitch in Paris resembles Mengelberg in other key respects too, such as those heated sequences at the heart of the first movement.

Serge Koussevitzky also chooses the hiatus route for his second Victor recording, a trailblazing 1949 magnetic tape production, big and resonant, with cymbals crashing all over the shop (most specifically in the finale), sundry affectionate details (the cellos at 9'27" into the first movement, *espressivo* as marked) and some interesting tempo relations, the most obvious being in the second movement, where the potentially optimistic *più mosso* (ie should move more quickly) second section is taken in tempo. Two versions with Toscanini's NBC Symphony Orchestra (the maestro himself never programmed the work with them) are of interest, the earliest under **Leopold Stokowski** (1941) characteristically excitable and at one point – 9'07" into the first movement, where for the mounting sequences Stokowski switches on the heat – somewhere close to swooning, broadening the tempo dramatically and ushering in velvet-hued portamentos. Thereafter, 'Stoky' fires off again on all cylinders. I shan't be a spoilsport and let on what else happens regarding tweaked dynamics, alarming tempo changes and so on, except to report, out of critical duty, an eight-bar cut in the finale.

More surprising still, perhaps, is **Erich Kleiber's** 1948 broadcast recording with the same orchestra which, although occasionally prone to error, is often of interpretative interest – for example, at 9'17"



into the first movement, beyond the central return of the fanfares, where Kleiber has the strings almost literally weep, pulling back the tempo in a way that no one else does, not even Stokowski. Also, in the second movement, the way he draws the woodwinds above the cellos – really beautiful, this – and the exaggerated *sforzandos* afterwards, pushing the tempo then relaxing again. His halting manner with the *più mosso* section (3'35") suggests the sort of 'speaking' rubato you'd more expect from an old-world Chopin pianist.

For me, the most convincing of **Herbert von Karajan's** various recordings of

Tchaikovsky's Fourth parallels Mahler's self-contained symphonic worlds

Tchaikovsky's Fourth is his 1960 Berlin version for EMI – refined, seductive, often disarmingly gentle and for the most part beautifully played. If, however, you want a live Fourth from Karajan's Philharmonia

years (1955), ICA Classics can provide one: although hardly captured in 'demonstration sound', it has bags of character (with very distinctive woodwind solos) and is high on adrenalin.

FIRED FROM THE HIP

Then there's **Hans Rosbaud** in 1957 with the Sudwestfunk Orchestra of Baden-Baden. The solidity and directness of this reading, and the way the sequences build at the core of the first movement, with no increase in tempo but simply in the power of the playing, are quite overwhelming and at the close of the movement there is no distracting hiatus prior to the *fff*



Staggering precision: Yevgeny Mravinsky recorded a benchmark Fourth in Leningrad in 1960

tremolando coda ... the music runs straight on as if on the wings of a sudden impulse. The *Andante in modo di canzone* is initially warm and relaxed, speeding a little for the *più mosso* passage at 4'08"; the way the cellos make their presence felt a little later on, from within the texture, is supportive and expressive (there are unmistakable parallels here with Willem Mengelberg). Rosbaud's way proves that with Tchaikovsky there's no need to generate hysteria or push tempos; his handling of the finale proves that beyond doubt. Both the opening and closing pages generate enormous reserves of intensity, winds and strings alternating with maximum force, while the return of the opening fanfares is awe-inspiring. And while it would be idle to claim that Rosbaud's orchestra is in the virtuoso class, the sensation of hearing a good band being stretched to the limit is in itself a source of listening excitement.

Constantin Silvestri with the Philharmonia, also from 1957 but in stereo, initially confound expectations by fussily toying with the work's fanfares

(something Silvestri didn't do in 1964 on his NHK Symphony broadcast recording, put out by King International). Malleable in the extreme and with some tellingly pointed playing, Silvestri's reading indulges the moment where Rosbaud respects the hour, offering an especially attentive account of the second movement. **Antal Dorati** and the London Symphony Orchestra in 1960 keep a tight rein on that first movement for a performance that, while extremely well ordered, achieves its emotional effect by the sheer brilliance of the playing. Dorati's reading is as honest as the day is long; there are no distracting dynamic 'tweaks', no transitional bends in the line, tempo-wise, and in general what you get is what is written. As a workable, well-recorded template (a classic Mercury Living Presence production), you won't do better.

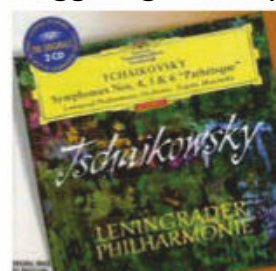
Yevgeny Mravinsky made a number of recordings of the Fourth, both live and for the studio, not all of them with the Leningrad Philharmonic; but when the chips are down the legendary September 1960 DG session at Wembley Town

FROM RUSSIA WITH FIRE

Leningrad PO / Yevgeny Mravinsky

DG © ② 477 5911GOR2

Mravinsky offers a performance where extreme dynamics, virtuosity and a staggering level of precision bowl me over



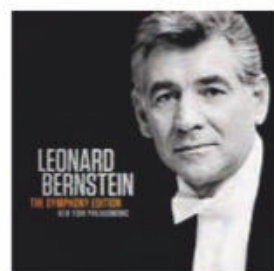
every time. Sometimes I crave greater warmth and maybe a little more flexibility but there's no questioning Mravinsky's absolute mastery of the score.

STRAIGHT FROM THE HEART

New York PO / Leonard Bernstein

Sony Classical © (60 discs) 88697 68365-2

With Leonard Bernstein, whose sexuality was a complex issue throughout his life, you feel that he could identify with the Fourth



like no one else. There's heartache in abundance but by the time the symphony has achieved closure you feel that Bernstein has too, even if you know he hasn't.

Hall, the only Mravinsky version of the symphony in stereo, has to be the one to go for. No one makes the arrival of the first movement's *Moderato con anima* 'first subject proper' sound quieter or more expressive (Tchaikovsky's own directive in the score) than Mravinsky does. In fact, he alone makes you realise just how much of the score's string-writing falls below *forte*, and the whiplash playing of the Leningrad strings at speed defies belief. I should in passing point out that there are no metronome markings for this symphony, at least not in the three scores that I've been using. As with Rosbaud in 1957, with Mravinsky there's no fussing, no meddling with dynamics or theatrical overstatement, just awesome precision, fabulous playing (I'm referring specifically to the Leningrad orchestra here) and an uplifting interpretation overall. Every note is pondered to infinity. **Mariss Jansons** in Oslo is very much 'son of Mravinsky', swiftly paced, sleekly inflected and, at 5'03" into the first movement (the clarinet waltz theme), notably balletic. He's also one of only two conductors (the other is Iván Fischer) who makes you aware that there are tamps *and* cellos/basses leading you to the final festivities (from 6'35"). Indeed, Jansons and Chandos make the point even more dramatically than Fischer and Channel do.

BERNSTEIN, KLEMPERER AND BEYOND

For me, **Leonard Bernstein** dug deeper beneath the Fourth's written notes than Karajan did. His way with the score connects with the music's very soul. Last year, writing about the conductor in the context of our celebratory Bernstein edition (8/18), I drew comparisons between Bernstein and Furtwängler; and if ever a recording proved the point, it is Bernstein's 1958 Fourth with the New York Philharmonic for Sony (there are various other versions under his baton but this is the one I would most happily opt for). Neither brazen nor flashy, excessively emotive or eccentric, Bernstein's 'first' Fourth, a broad and lovingly phrased

ONE TO RANK WITH BEETHOVEN

SWF Orch, Baden-Baden / Hans Rosbaud

SWR Music © ② SWR19062CD

Intellectual rigour was Rosbaud's principal quality as a conductor and his reading is high in both intelligence and poetry,



the finale thrillingly conclusive, even though his SWF orchestra is no Leningrad Phil. Between them they get the message across, and that's what matters.

affair, is played from the heart, though he rarely wears his heart on his sleeve. In the second movement, for example, his oboist – presumably Harold Gomberg, who was the orchestra's section leader at the time – plays with finesse and flexibility, the wind lines beautifully drawn, the flute, too, responding with real poetry. Throughout, you'll notice expressive gradations of tempo and powerful climaxes, while the symphony's close is quite electrifying.

Riccardo Muti and the Philharmonia in 1979 offer a performance that for me packs in most of what's needed for a fine Tchaikovsky Fourth: respect for the score, an appreciation of the music's emotional climate, an ability to build and relax tension where necessary and consistently fine playing from the Philharmonia. **Sergiu Celibidache** and the Munich Philharmonic recorded live in 1993, while notoriously slow (rather too slow in fact), nonetheless provide a sort of refresher course in how to appreciate the highly sophisticated way Tchaikovsky built this mighty symphonic structure. And yet in the finale, where the fanfares return, Muti's more regular speed allows for an overwhelming build-up to that heart-stopping moment that Tchaikovsky the prophet had been waiting to deliver – the moment itself a hammer blow of unprecedented force. It has to be heard. **Otto Klemperer**, also with the Philharmonia, albeit in 1963, offers a reading notable for its upstanding reportage and nobility of spirit, but something strange happens early on in the first movement (5'23"), where the clarinet offers decorative little downward curlicues and the second flute takes over, followed by the first flute which in turn gives way to the bass clarinet. With Klemperer, the first flute has the bass clarinet play beneath him – an editorial anomaly, I wonder, or simply a wrong entry? No great tragedy, it's true, but irritating on repetition.

As to the playful Scherzo, where pizzicato strings suggest – according to Tchaikovsky at least – memories of a drunken peasant, most performers do pretty well but I especially warm to **George Szell's** 1962 Decca LSO recording, an orderly, dramatic affair and, in the Scherzo, delightfully (and rather untypically) off the leash. As to the Trio, with its memories of distant military music and other fleeting images, **Gennady Rozhdestvensky** and the Moscow Radio Symphony Orchestra, although rather too heavy-handed and resonantly recorded elsewhere in the symphony, really capture the magic, with some especially brilliant woodwind-playing.



Hans Rosbaud's 1957 recording stretches his south-west German radio players to their limits

FOURTHS FOR THE 21st CENTURY

Semyon Bychkov's Fourth with the Czech Philharmonic suggests solemnity rather than defiance, especially in the opening fanfares. Traditionally the F minor journeys from warning alarms to reckless abandon, with all manner of subtle asides in between, here sensitively negotiated tempo-wise so that nothing jars. In the second movement, winds and horns are tellingly supportive of the cellos and at 5'32" the basses are nicely underlined,

a detail that hardly registers on many other versions. The Scherzo is as crisp as ice, with prominently screeching piccolos. If you opt for Bychkov, you won't be short-changed.

As I said when reviewing **Iván Fischer's** version with the Budapest Festival Orchestra back in 2005, the conductor asserts some very individual colours right from the opening fanfares, with tiny rhetorical hesitations between the second and third and third and fourth bars, and then a broadening as the full brass choir

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

DATE / ARTISTS	RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1929 Concertgebouw Orch / Mengelberg	Pristine Audio (M) ② PASC511 (2/30 ^R , 1/18)
1941 NBC SO / Stokowski	Cala (M) ➔ CACD0505 (10/96)
1948 NBC SO / Kleiber	Urania (M) ➔ 803680 555750
1949 Boston SO / Koussevitzky	Pristine Audio (F) PASC247
1955 Philh Orch / Karajan	ICA Classics (F) ICAC5142 (1/18)
1956 French Nat Rad Orch / Markevitch	Erato (S) ⑩ 2564 61549-3 (12/15)
1957 SWF Orch, Baden-Baden / Rosbaud	SWR Music (B) ② SWR19062CD (9/18)
1957 Philh Orch / Silvestri	EMI (S) ⑩ 723347-2 (11/57 ^R , 7/13)
1958 New York PO / Bernstein	Sony Classical (S) (60 discs) 88697 68365-2 (11/59 ^R , 2/11)
1960 Leningrad PO / Mravinsky	DG (S) ② 477 591GOR2 (6/61 ^R)
1960 LSO / Dorati	Mercury (S) ⑤ ➔ 475 6261MM5 (7/62 ^R , 12/04)
1960 BPO / Karajan	Warner Classics (S) ⑦ 2564 63362-0 (11/60 ^R , 8/14)
1962 LSO / Szell	Decca (S) ⑤ ➔ 475 6780DC5 (9/05)
1963 Philharmonia Orch / Klemperer	Warner Classics (S) ⑩ 404309-2 (8/13)
1972/74 Moscow RSO / Rozhdestvensky	Melodiya (M) ⑤ ➔ MELCD100 1754
1979 Philh Orch / Muti	Warner Classics (S) ⑤ 2564 62782-5; (S) ⑦ 097999-2 (3/80 ^R)
1984 Oslo PO / Jansons	Chandos (F) CHAN8361 (7/85 ^R , 9/85); (S) ⑥ CHAN10392
1993 Munich PO / Celibidache	Warner Classics (S) (110 discs) 9029 55815-4 (2/19)
2004 Budapest Fest Orch / I Fischer	Channel Classics (F) CCSSA21704 (1/05)
2006 S Cecilia Orch / Pappano	Warner Classics (M) ② ➔ 353258-2 (3/07)
2010 Mariinsky Orch / Gergiev	Mariinsky (S) ② MAR0017
2011 LPO / Jurowski	LPO (S) ② LPO0064 (12/12); (S) ⑦ LPO0101 (1/18)
2015 Mariinsky Orch / Gergiev	Mariinsky (M) ② MAR0593
2015 RLPO / V Petrenko	Onyx (M) ② ONYX4162 (3/17)
2017 LSO / Nosedá	LSO Live (M) LSO0810 (3/19)
2018 Czech PO / Bychkov	Decca (S) ⑦ 483 4942DX7 (10/19)

MUSIC THERAPY

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Vladimir Jurowski's fastidiously crafted 2011 recording takes the palm

march grimly towards the fanfares' repeat. Fischer's 'traditional' orchestral layout (with antiphonally divided violins) delivers most usefully in the second movement which, aside from an exquisite solo oboe at the start, has fastidiously articulated violin desks that dart to and fro around the principal theme. One of my litmus tests is the crucial weighting of wind chords at the passage that starts with the cellos at 7'43". It's one of the most mysterious moments in all of Tchaikovsky and beautifully done here. The Scherzo provides a delightful diversion, while Fischer's finale recalls Mravinsky in its drive and precision, the strings light but supercharged, the folk-like second subject limpid and in tempo and, when it returns just before the fanfare's call to arms later on, with carefully pointed staccatos. As ever with Fischer, defined articulation is a matter of artistic principle.

Antonio Pappano's Santa Cecilia recording is graced by an especially warm string tone, with subtle portamentos added. He's strong on dynamics too, the *pianissimo* strings alongside the timpani at 6'40" into the first movement being notably delicate, although, like many other conductors (Andris Nelsons on Orfeo, Mariss Jansons on Chandos and Christian Lindberg on BIS, for example) he does add a few attention-seeking diminuendo-crescendos of his own – a small point that will irritate others less than it irritates me. As to Pappano's strengths, the

holds-barred performance generates considerable excitement, so much so that passing reservations often vanish in the heat of the moment. Woodwind curlicues that adorn the first movement's quieter sections are very expressively played; there is no unwritten hiatus to bother the first movement's coda, though unwritten crescendos à la Mengelberg do rather get in the way a little later on. Still, I much prefer **Vladimir Jurowski** with the London Philharmonic in 2011, a reading that scores high on the Richter scale yet adheres tightly to the work's fastidiously crafted design, the first movement's closing pages fervent in the extreme, with the tremolando 'bridge' intact, the *Andantino* beautifully expressed. As with Rosbaud and Mravinsky, with Jurowski the 'honesty is the best policy' principle serves Tchaikovsky well. **Gianandrea Noseda** and the LSO offer a similarly comprehensive view of the piece in magnificent sound (probably the best version we have, sound-wise), holding the first movement together without recourse to prettifying idiosyncrasies – save for some added crescendos in the first movement's coda – with taut rhythms and thrillingly prominent timps.

Valery Gergiev in the Concert Hall of the Mariinsky Theatre in 2015 dives headlong into the very soul of the work, the second-movement *Andante* especially (a very broad 11'28"; Klemperer clocks up a mere 9'18",

fervent sequences at 11'06" push forwards without overheating, and the frenzied ruckus straight afterwards is usefully transparent. The coda is perfect, though at 18'45" Pappano dips for an added crescendo. The finale, too, is excellent, with impactful, machine-gun brass at the end. A good performance, this – very good in fact – but not, I would say, a great one.

Vasily Petrenko and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic in 2015 also apply unnecessary face powder to a score that doesn't need it, any more than Brahms or Beethoven symphonies do. That said, Petrenko's hot-headed, no-

Furtwängler 10'12"). No respite here, whereas the close of the opening movement cries its message without any tiresome impediment. This is a weighty, purposeful, deeply serious Fourth, and Russian to the core. But it has a predecessor, recently issued, with the same forces recorded in 2010 at the Salle Pleyel in Paris, a generally lighter sound (the finale's thwacking bass drum makes a more vivid showing in St Petersburg) and a similar performance, though the *Andante cantabile* isn't quite so soulful. But something very odd happens around 14'25" into the first movement – the return of the quiet waltz sequence and what sounds like a clumsy edit. I couldn't take that on repetition, which rather puts it out of court.

GUILTY OMISSIONS AND VERDICT

Of course, there are numerous other recordings I've listened to, all yielding some degree of pleasure – Abbado (two versions), Barbirolli, Cantelli, Enescu (in Moscow), Eschenbach, Fistoulari, Fricsay, Gatti, Gauk, Haitink, Kubelík (three versions), Maazel, Munch, Ormandy (two versions), Ozawa (two versions), Pletnev (two versions), Previn, Kurt Sanderling, Serebrier, Solti, Steinberg, Svetlanov, Weller and so on. I'd need an entire issue of *Gramophone* to do them all critical justice. But without resorting to endless digressions, the verdict I've come up with is Jurowski for a prime digital recommendation (just ahead of Fischer), Bernstein in 1958 for a 'Fourth as confessional', Rosbaud in 1957 as the most structure-conscious reading, Mravinsky as the most uncompromisingly Russian of the Russians – and if I may be permitted a 'historical' extra, Mengelberg in 1929 for colour, flamboyance and a soloistic approach to phrasing. Given those five, I reckon you'd be well placed to relish what is surely the most gripping of Tchaikovsky's symphonies, as soaked in love as the Fifth and as devastating as the Sixth. **G**

TOP DIGITAL CHOICE

LPO / Vladimir Jurowski

LPO © ② LPO0064; © ⑦ LPO0101

Vladimir Jurowski gives the impression of having pondered long and hard to arrive at a workable balance between visceral excitement and respect for how the Fourth is structured. His is a performance that



is both thrillingly spontaneous and tellingly cerebral. The LPO play brilliantly and the recording captures their performance with impressive luminosity.

PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

Presenting live concert and opera performances from around the world and reviews of archived music-making available online to stream where you want, when you want

Elbphilharmonie Hamburg and free online

November 1

Newly installed as Music Director of the NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra, **Alan Gilbert** (late of the New York PO) conducts a pair of Verdi Requiems – clearly a popular work at the moment, see the next entry – in the orchestra's home hall. Joined by **Angela Meade**, **Daniela Barcellona**, **Gregory Kunde** and **Riccardo Zanellato** alongside the Rundfunkchor Berlin and the NDR Chorus, the second concert will be streamed live on the Elbphilharmonie's own site.

elbphilharmonie.de, ndr.de/orchester_chor/
elbphilharmonieorchester/

Philharmonie, Berlin & online

November 2, 8 & 30

Up for viewing this month via the Berlin Philharmonic's Digital Concert Hall are two guest conducting appearances from **Zubin Mehta**. The first (November 2) presents Richard Strauss's *Don Quixote* with viola and cello soloists Amihai Grosz and Ludwig Quandt, paired with Beethoven's Symphony No 3. The second concert (November 8) is a single-work one: Bruckner's Symphony No 8. And from a conductor with a long track record with this ensemble, to someone making his debut, **Teodor Currentzis** (November 30). He takes on a work that used to be a great favourite in Berlin of both Herbert von Karajan and Claudio Abbado, Verdi's Requiem. His soloists include **Zarina Abaeva**, **Clémétine Margaine** and **Evgeny Stavinsky** (the tenor had yet to be named) and the choir will be his own **MusicAeterna Chorus** from Perm in Russia.

digitalconcerthall.com

Philharmonie, Luxembourg & takt1

November 4

Veteran **Rudolf Buchbinder** is the soloist for Beethoven's Piano Concerto No 2 for this live-streamed Luxembourg concert by **Mariss Jansons** and the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra. Also on the programme are Weber's Overture from *Euryanthe* and Shostakovich's Symphony No 10.

takt1.com, philharmonie.lu

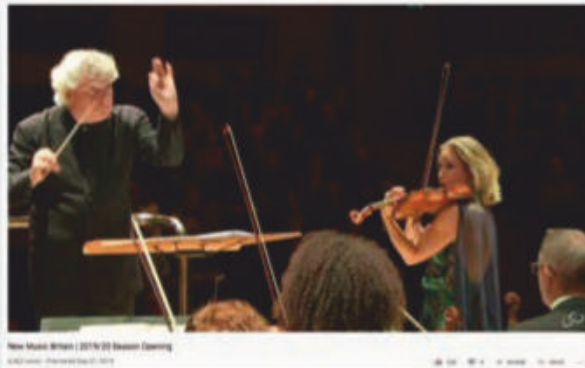
Royal Opera House, Covent Garden & cinemas nationwide

November 5

Covent Garden's live relay into UK cinemas this month is a Royal Ballet programme, set to some exceptionally tempting repertoire under

ARCHIVE CONCERT REVIEW

A blistering, all-English programme to open Rattle's third season at the LSO



Howard C. Matthews . Walton

A promised violin concerto from Emily Howard had mutated into *Antisphere*, a volatile, 15-minute finale to a symphonic triptych shaped around curves. Glissandi and uneven tuning feature prominently, as you might expect, but so do the illusions of simultaneous slowing down and speeding up to be experienced in big pieces from Beethoven to Ligeti and Adams. The form is taut, the journey as full of peril as a black run, the conclusion at once rounded and yet unstable, twisting into the vision of a more distant and spacious orbit.

There follows the decade-old Violin Concerto by Colin Matthews, first conducted by the late Oliver Knussen and apparently set fair like Knussen's concerto to become a modern British

classic – more abrasive than Knussen's contribution to the genre, no less searching and likewise drawing on a glittering, French-accented solo-violin lexicon developed by Szymanowski (and again Ligeti) and refined by Matthews specifically for Leila Josefowicz. This kind of tough lyricism plays to her strengths, and she exerted a magnetic aura in the hall which the oblique camerawork only fitfully captures.

But this was a concert that just kept getting better – even during the course of Walton's First Symphony, which usually ends in a splash of hastily applied greasepaint. For this revival, Rattle kept his powder dry and textures buoyant through the first movement – not so much a juggernaut as a TT bike dicing with death on the Isle of Man – before relishing the most malicious, Mussorgskian colours of the Scherzo and generating enough pathos from the *Andante* for the problematic finale to bring genuine catharsis. An LSO Live release will surely follow: for now, the YouTube video is essential viewing.

Peter Quantrill

Available to watch for free on the LSO's YouTube channel until December 20, 2019

the baton of Pavel Sorokin. Opening the evening is *Concerto*, **Kenneth MacMillan's** virtuoso ballet set to Shostakovich's Second Piano Concerto. Quintessentially British ballet follows, with **Frederick Ashton's** choreography to Elgar's *Enigma* Variations, themed around the composer himself and his world. The music of Glazunov then brings things to a climax, with **Rudolf Nureyev's** adaptation of **Marius Petipa's** choreography to the final act of *Raymonda*.

roh.org.uk/showings

Orchestra Hall, Detroit & free online

November 8 & 17

The first of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra's November offerings is noteworthy, because they're under the baton of **Dalia Stasevska** (the BBC Symphony Orchestra's newly appointed Principal Guest Conductor) in her Detroit debut. Her programme opens with a new work by Julia Wolfe, followed with

Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No 1 played by **Simon Trpčeski** before climaxing with Sibelius's nostalgic Symphony No 1. The second then sees the orchestra's Music Director Laureate **Leonard Slatkin** returning to conduct Ravel's orchestration of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* paired with another premiere: *An Affirming Flame* by Arab-American composer Mohammed Fairouz.

livefromorchestrahall.vhx.tv

San Carlo Theatre, Naples & free on Operavision

November 9

Rossini's dramatic and difficult-to-pull-off *Ermione* doesn't get all that many onstage airings, and indeed it's hasn't enjoyed the easiest of lives right from the beginning. Its 1819 debut was branded a failure, and it was mothballed right up until 1977. So Jacopo Spirei's 'ambitious' new production for the Teatro San Carlo should be well worth

catching, not least because Naples was the opera's birthplace. **Carmen Giannattasio** sings the title role, and **Alessandro De Marchi** conducts.

operavision.eu

Rose Studio, Lincoln Center, New York & free online

November 14 & 21

The **Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center**, New York, celebrating its 50th anniversary, launches 'In Concert with CMS', a new monthly programme on ALL ARTS, the broadcast channel, streaming platform and website dedicated to the arts. Programming is available on the ALL ARTS website, streaming apps on iOS and Android smartphone and tablets; Roku, Apple TV and Amazon Fire TV. During the month of November, concerts and talks from Rose Studio will be streamed live. Eye-catching events include a 'Late Night Rose' on November 14, hosted by Fred Child, focusing on Bartók's Third String Quartet and Dvořák's String Quintet in G with the **Callidore Quartet** and double-bass player **Xavier Foley**, and, on November 21, pianists **Michael Brown** and **Orion Weiss** play the four-hand version of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* and Messiaen's *Visions de l'Amen*. But do check out the CMS website for the full menu of events. Also worth listening out for is 'The Phenomenal 50', a weekly podcast series spotlighting some of the finest CMS concerts from the past 50 years. Each instalment, released every Monday throughout the season, is introduced by David Finckel and Wu Han. The programmes are available on the CMS website, as well as Apple

Podcasts, Spotify and Google Podcasts.

chambermusicsociety.org

Concertgebouw, Amsterdam & free online

November 17

If you missed **Stephen Hough's** Mendelssohn Piano Concerto No 1 at the BBC Prom this summer, here's another opportunity to hear him play it, and while this one isn't on Queen Victoria's own piano, it is viewable for free, and from the best (virtual) seats. The orchestra is the Netherlands Radio PO under **David Robertson**, and it's partnered with a real contrast of a work: Sibelius's Symphony No 1. concertgebouw.nl

Staatsoper, Munich

November 23

Two years ago the DVD of Andreas Homoki's production of Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* for Zurich Opera won the Opera category of the *Gramophone Awards*, and a major draw was **Christian Gerhaher** – a winner this year in the Solo Vocal category – in the title role. So we expect a strong performance as he reprises the role for Andreas Kriegenburg's staging at Munich Staatsoper, paired once again with **Gun-Brit Barkmin** as Marie. **Hartmut Haenchen** conducts, and further cast members include **John Daszak** as the Captain and **Jens Larson** as the Doctor.

staatsoper.de

Gothenburg Concert Hall & free online

November 23

This may well be our favourite pick this month. First, because the violin soloist is **Nemanja**

Radulović, an artist known for bending the rules with such conviction and virtuosity that it's impossible not to get carried along with him. Secondly, because the work for which he's joining **Santtu-Matias Rouvali** and the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra is Aram Khachaturian's dramatic Violin Concerto – a slightly lesser-spotted work on the concert platform, and one whose drama sounds like a perfect fit for Radulović. It's paired with Sibelius's Symphony No 4.

gso.se/en/gsoplay

Royal Academy of Music, London & free online

November 29

This lunchtime concert from the RAM features **Sir Mark Elder** leading the Academy Chamber Orchestra in a Berlioz programme. They kick off with the Overture to *Les francs-juges*. Then comes the March to the Scaffold from *Symphonie fantastique* and the March of the Pilgrims from *Harold in Italy*. Then they finish with another overture, *King Lear*. Catch it on the academy's web page, and note that if you want to watch it live then you first have to 'like' the page. The recording will then stay on the page after the event for everyone to watch.

facebook.com/royalacademyofmusic

Konzerthaus, Dortmund & Takt1

December 1

Catch the London Symphony Orchestra and **Gianandrea Noseda** on tour in Bruch's Violin Concerto from **Janine Jansen** followed by Tchaikovsky's Symphony No 4.

konzerthaus-dortmund.de, takt1.com

ARCHIVE OPERA REVIEW

Janáček's Jenůfa from the composer's home town of Brno where the opera was first heard 115 years ago

Janáček

'There's always a production going on here: one finishes, another starts', observes the stage director Martin Glaser, noting the continuing tradition of the Moravian city's National Theatre as the launchpad of Janáček's first major successful opera. Glaser's production provides that special bonus of fluent native speakers. His staging concentrates on narrative and character development with few interventionist touches.

Pavel Borák's scenery is clean and naturalistic with symbolic touches. A stage full of freshly fallen apples serves for a colourful Act 1 mill scene, suggestive of both a Garden of Eden's innocence and temptations and of the image drunken, unsuitable lover Števa conjures for Jenůfa's cheeks before she's slashed by Laca's knife. For Act 2



multiple identical living rooms with pale walls bare apart from crucifix and a Virgin Mary picture show the isolation of Jenůfa's enforced stay in the Kostelnička's house. This changes to just one room for the wedding reception in Act 3 which (a clever coup) sinks into the floor out of sight as the Kostelnička is led away

to prison, leaving the now fully reconciled Laca and Jenůfa in just cross light on a bare stage.

Strong casting pays special attention to Janáček's vocal demands and dramatic colours. Both Pavla Vykopalová's serious heroine and Szilvia Rálik's focused, concentratedly neurotic Kostelnička (a pity she's denied her full Act 1 monologue) have top notes to

burn. Tomáš Juhás (Števa) and Jaroslav Březina (Laca) are adept at remaining real country folk while providing suitably strong tenor leads. Marko Ivanović and his orchestra balances dramatic weight and folkloric zip. **Mike Ashman**

Available to watch for free at operavision.eu until April 2, 2020

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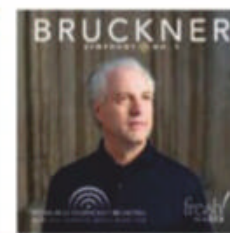
THIS MONTH An innovative wireless speaker from a famous British name, a tiny headphone amplifier from China – and might direct-sell be the future of hi-fi?

Andrew Everard, Audio Editor

NOVEMBER TEST DISCS



A striking *Winterreise* from Thomas Oliemans and Paolo Giacometti benefits greatly from high-resolution sound all the way up to DSD512.



Living up to the promise of Reference's Fresh! label, a dramatic Bruckner Ninth from the Pittsburgh Symphony under Manfred Honeck.

Another new series, another new material

It's a time of consolidation and evolutionary development in hi-fi – just don't tell Dutch company Prima Luna

With the French company Focal, it's usually a case of 'another new series, another new material'. It's one of the benefits of having in-house research and development, and memorably saw the introduction some years back of speakers with cones based around French-grown flax fibres. This time round it's 'slatefiber', featured in the company's new Chora series **1**, replacing the existing Chorus models: the new drivers, used for mid-range and bass duties, employ 'thermoplastic polymer, with non-woven recycled carbon fibres that achieve even greater damping, rigidity and lightness', with claimed improvements to balance in the mid-range, and sound-staging said to be remarkable. The new speakers also use the company's TNF aluminium/magnesium tweeter and house the drivers in enclosures available in black, light wood or dark wood enclosures. Three models are available, starting with the two-way Chora 806 bookshelf/standmount model, selling for £599 a pair, with matching stands available at £199/pr. The smaller of the two floorstanders is the £1099/pr Chora 816, which is a 2.5-way design, while the larger three-way Chora 826 is £1299/pr. Focal promises more additions to the range next year, with the emphasis on home cinema applications.

Meanwhile Focal stablemate Naim, having already launched its second-generation Mu-so all-in-one system, has added to its range a revised version of the smaller Mu-so Qb **2**. The new £749 model offers upgrades to both the technology and the styling, taking on board Naim's highly flexible 'future platform' – already used in the latest Unit models and the current ND-series network music



players – to extend the range of online services the unit can access. It comes with a burnished grey aluminium chassis and the same upgraded drive units found in the latest full-size Mu-so; and as well as allowing the user to control it with either the touch panel within the illuminated volume dial, or the Naim app, it now comes with a new remote control handset. As standard the Qb comes with a black grille but this can be replaced with optional covers in Olive, Terracotta or Peacock.

While some companies are upgrading here and there, the Dutch valve amp specialist Prima Luna has replaced its entire 12-strong range with new models and launched a new valve-based digital-to-analogue converter. The new EvoLution series **3** is now organised into four levels, from EVO 100 to EVO 400, with each level including an integrated amplifier, a pre-amp and a power amp. Improvements include enhanced components and internal wiring and, on some models, XLR connections, a dedicated headphone amp and the option of adding phono capability to the integrated and pre-amp models using an additional module. The EVO 100 Tube Digital AnaLogue Converter, meanwhile,

features the world's first valve-based data-clocking device. It sells for £2888, while the range starts with the EVO 100 integrated, pre- and power amps at £2198 apiece and goes up to the EVO 400 integrated amplifier at £4598. All integrated and power amp models come with EL34 valves as standard, with an Adaptive AutoBias circuit making it easy for users to select other valves if they wish.

On sale in November is Onkyo's latest receiver, the £799 TX-8390 **4**, which has network music playback, Apple Airplay 2, six HDMI inputs for sound from TV, Blu-ray and other video sources, and even the ability to be voice-controlled using an Alexa device. However, it isn't a multichannel home cinema device but rather a two-channel receiver with 200W per channel from the company's Dynamic Audio Amplification, which uses its high current capability for better speaker control. Onkyo says: 'A high-current, low-noise power transformer and high-current smoothing capacitors have been engineered to exacting specifications, and parts have been selected on a "listen-measure-listen" basis to ensure the amp sounds good to human ears, not just on paper. Dual transistors on the power-amp circuitry's voltage-amp stage boost current for deeper bass, while a non-phase-shift topology improves instrument separation, sound-staging, and brings layers of detail into sharp focus.' Nonetheless, the receiver will play music from local network storage as well as Amazon Music, Deezer, Spotify, TIDAL and TuneIn, all via Onkyo's Controller app, and features AccuEQ calibration, originally developed for multichannel applications but now reworked for stereo. The TX-8390 is available in silver or black. **6**

● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Bowers & Wilkins Formation Wedge

A highly unusual shape filled with innovative technology: could this be the ultimate answer for one-box, hi-fi wireless sound?

Make no mistake about it – for a company responsible for groundbreaking personal audio speakers such as its Zeppelin series, which started out as glorified iPod speaker-docks and then became so much more, it has taken Bowers & Wilkins long enough to get into the multiroom wireless speaker market. However, there's an argument for not always being first to market. Sometimes it pays to sit back and let others innovate, make mistakes and learn from them, while you watch, learn and refine your own offering for launch.

That's certainly the way the Worthing-based company seems to have played things. It explains that one of its fundamental goals was to produce the same quality of sound available from its conventional wired speakers but do so wirelessly. Indeed, it says that if it couldn't attain that goal, there would simply have been no point even bothering with its own wireless speaker system.

The result, getting on for a decade and a half since US company Sonos first revealed its wireless music speakers, is the Bowers & Wilkins Formation Suite: a range of five models (and growing), designed to address all kinds of home entertainment needs. What's more, they're packed with innovative technology designed to make the most of their performance, whether you choose to use just one speaker for convenient wireless music or build up a whole-house set-up.

The most obviously Bowers & Wilkins speakers in the range come in the form of the Formation Duo, the priciest offering at £3499/pr and with easily recognisable

BOWERS & WILKINS FORMATION WEDGE

Type Wireless Stereo Loudspeaker

Price £899

Drive units 2x25mm tweeters, 2x9cm mid-range, 15cm subwoofer

Amplification 4x40W plus 1x80W

File compatibility Up to 96kHz/24-bit

Connectivity Wi-Fi/mesh, Ethernet, Bluetooth, AirPlay 2, Roon-ready

Finishes Black or white

Dimensions (WxHxD)

44x23.2x24.3cm

bowerswilkins.com



corporate design elements. For a start, they're (almost) conventional-looking speakers of bookshelf/standmount size, and use the company's 25mm Carbon Dome high frequency unit mounted in its 'tweeter on top pod', sitting on the main enclosure. The mid/bass driver is a 16.5cm version of the Continuum woven-cone driver first seen in the flagship 800 Series Diamond speakers, and now permeating its way through the company's range where once bright yellow Kevlar cones held sway. The drivers are each powered by a 125W amplifier within the speaker.

For TV sound/home cinema use, the range offers the Formation Bar, a slender soundbar using three 25mm 'double dome' tweeters and six 6.5cm woven fibreglass cone mid/bass units, driven by 6x40W of amplification. It sells for £999, and could

be partnered with the £899 Formation Bass subwoofer, combining a pair of horizontally opposed 16.5cm long-throw bass units driven by 250W of amplification.

If you have an existing hi-fi system you'd like to convert into a wireless music device, Bowers & Wilkins also offers the £599 Formation Audio, which will stream music into an amplifier from network and online sources, and also make the output from your hi-fi available on the wireless network. The most innovative product in the range, however, is the £899 Formation Wedge we have here, designed as a single-point stereo speaker capable of filling a room with sound. With its textured grille, available in black or white, covering the whole of the front of its wedge-shaped housing it looks like no other speaker, and neither is what's inside in any way conventional.

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SUGGESTED PARTNERS

Here are a couple of suggestions to make the most of the Wedge speaker ...

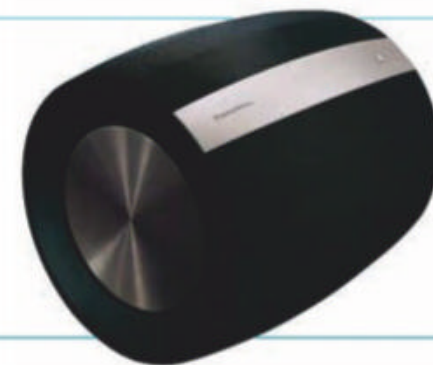
THE EDGE

At just 6.5kg, the Wedge is designed to be used freestanding, or wall-mounted using this dedicated bracket.



FORMATION BASS SUBWOOFER

If you want a really big sound from your Wedge, consider combining it with the Formation Bass subwoofer.



Within, no fewer than five drive units are used: a pair of 25mm Decoupled Double Dome tweeters, derived from the company's 600 Series speakers and each driven by a 40W amplifier; two 9cm mid-range units, using the company's Fixed Suspension Transducer technology and again powered by a duo of 40W amps; and a 15cm subwoofer with its own 80W amp. The drivers are arranged over a 120-degree arc to give that wide stereo image, and the audio system combines digital signal processing and dynamic equalisation to get the most out of the drivers and their digital amplifiers. Although the Wedge can look large in pictures, in fact it's only 44cm wide and less than 25cm tall and deep, yet it manages to create an impressive sense of sound stage, with excellent detailing and even plenty of weight.

So how does Formation work? Well, a prerequisite of the system was that it should handle music at up to 96kHz/24-bit, be immune to wireless interference likely to cause drop-outs or diminish sound quality, and have extremely accurate synchronisation between speakers, not just for room-to-room coherence but also to allow precise stereo imaging when pairs of speakers are used together, as in Formation Duo.

To that end, and unlike rival products, Formation sets up its own wireless Mesh network, independent of the home Wi-Fi and thus not prone to other demands on the data capacity, which can be a major problem when everything from computers and TV devices to security and home automation products is fighting for bandwidth. It's all part of the effort to achieve 'Wired Fidelity, Wirelessly' and 'The Highest Form of Sound', to quote a couple of the slogans for Formation, and allows the system to achieve synchronisation between the speakers with a maximum error of less than 1/1000th of a second.

PERFORMANCE


There's quite a lot of sloganeering in the information for Formation – the standard for that 'Wired Fidelity' is 'Superlative Bowers & Wilkins Sound', for example – and it would all seem a little OTT if the system didn't deliver on its promises. I have to admit I didn't have high hopes

for the Wedge, expecting a spot of 'form over function' to come into play, but I was pleasantly surprised with just how easy it was to set up and use, and how well it performed both for background listening and when closer attention was being paid.

One of B&W's fundamental goals was to produce the same sound quality available from its conventional wired speakers but do so wirelessly

From new, Formation products power up in set-up mode, and can then be addressed via Bluetooth by an Android or iOS device running the company's Bowers & Wilkins Home app, which walks the user through the rest of the set-up process. The first device you set up will require access to your home Wi-Fi, as this is required for communication with network services – including the device running the app – but after that new Formation products will just join the Mesh network created by the initial product. Multiple speakers can also be combined in what are called Formation Spaces – zones, in other words – for example combining a Wedge with a Bass and an Audio device to connect an existing system, or running the Duo speakers with the Bass subwoofer.

After that, it's easy to play to the speaker(s) from sources including networked stored music – your own library on a NAS or computer, for example – or online services including Apple Music, Spotify, Tidal and internet radio services, directly from AirPlay 2 and Bluetooth devices, and as a Roon endpoint. In every case the sound quality is quite remarkable for a 'one-box' stereo speaker, more than capable of filling a decent-sized room, and with excellent clarity.

If there's a criticism it's that, while reasonable enough, the Home app isn't as slick as the very best out there, but then they've had lots of time to refine and improve their offerings and updates will no doubt be forthcoming. But there's nothing here to distract from what is a very impressive introduction to the Formation system. 

Or you could try ...

Given the relatively late arrival on the market of the Formation Suite, it's hardly surprising that it faces no shortage of competition.

Sonos speakers

An obvious rival is the largest of the Sonos speaker range, the Play:5. Like all Sonos speakers, the Play:5 is currently limited to CD-quality 44.1kHz/16-bit sound but the multi-driver is considerably less expensive than the Formation Wedge; and indeed, for not much more than the price of the Wedge, you could buy a pair of Play:5s and use them as a wireless stereo set-up. More details at [sonos.com](https://www.sonos.com).



Sound United HEOS 7 HS2

The largest speaker in the HEOS range from Sound United, parent company of Denon and Marantz, is the HEOS 7 HS2, which is nothing to do with railway projects and all about twin tweeters and woofers, and a powerful onboard subwoofer boosted with dual passive radiators, for a big, detailed stereo sound from a single enclosure. It handles hi-res music and can be voice-controlled using Alexa devices. Find out more at [heos.com](https://www.heos.com).



Naim Mu-so

Finally, an all-in-one system often said to set the standard for wireless music units, the Naim Mu-so. It's a hefty soundbar-shaped enclosure, complete with an illuminated and very tactile touch controller/volume control on the top and a choice of grille colours, and will play music from network and online services, as well as directly via Bluetooth and AirPlay 2. Under the skin in the second-generation version, in which 95 per cent of the construction is new, is an array of six drivers optimised with stablemate Focal, and 450W of amplification, making it easily the most powerful here. And it sounds it, with a huge, rich and detailed sound way beyond that of the already impressive original Mu-so. For all the details, see [naimaudio.com](https://www.naimaudio.com).



● REVIEW

Shanling UP2

Compact dimensions, a bargain price and no shortage of performance make this DAC/headphone amplifier a perfect pocket companion

Regular readers will know that Chinese company Shanling's products have found favour in these pages in the past. The tiny M0 personal music player (A/18), selling for just under £100, is a very definite bargain – provided you're nimble-fingered enough to use its minute touch-screen – and delivers levels of performance belying its miniature dimensions.

Impressive, too, are the company's ME100 in-ear monitor headphones (7/19), proving that even with a £120 price tag it's possible to deliver a high-end sound, not to mention a design and finish suggesting a much higher price. Now, via UK agents KS Distribution, based down on the south coast at Shoreham-by-Sea, Shanling has expanded its miniature hi-fi range with the arrival of the UP2, a combined Bluetooth headphone amplifier and USB digital-to-analogue converter, selling for just £79.99.

I was amused to receive a box from KS not much smaller than that for the pair of shoes delivered in the same post – but within, wrapped in a mass of paper packing, was another relatively tiny box finished to the usual high Shanling standard, complete with a wrap-around lid with a magnetic closure. Open that, and nestling inside was the little UP2, finished in gloss black, measuring just 55mm long, 27mm wide and 12mm thick, and weighing 26g.

Pull out the foam in which it sits and you reveal a generous connecting cable, with a standard USB plug on one end and a USB-C on the other, which is used for charging the internal battery and when the UP2 is connected to a computer. There's also a clear plastic holder for the unit, with a clip to hold it in place in a pocket or on a belt, and an instruction leaflet.

Just for once, you will need those instructions. The connectivity here may be obvious – that USB-C on one end and a 3.5mm stereo headphone/line-out socket on the other – but there's no immediate sign of a display, and just a single control on the right-hand side of the tiny casework.

This looks like a volume control, and indeed it is, with an impressive 64 steps to allow precise adjustment of level – many devices of this kind only give 16 steps. But the presence of a power switch symbol

SHANLING UP2

Type Bluetooth/USB DAC/headphone amplifier

Price £79.99

Inputs Bluetooth 5.0 with aptX HD, LDAC/LHDC, USB Type C digital

Output 3.5mm stereo

Battery 11 hours' use from two hours' charge, 400mAh

Accessories supplied

Clip case, USB-A to USB-C cable

Dimensions (HxWxD) 5.5x2.7x1.2cm

shanling.com

ksdistribution.co.uk

hifiheadphones.co.uk



below the control

suggests there's more going on here. There is: a 3.5-second press on the control turns the UP2 on and off, while pressing for five seconds when the unit is turned on starts Bluetooth pairing, with a blue and red indicator flashing on the front of the casework. While that's happening, search for 'Shanling UP2' in your phone or whatever's Bluetooth setting, and the light turns into a slow-flashing blue when pairing is achieved.

The UP2 surprised in its ability to play at more than decent levels without any signs of stress

In use, the same button switches between play and pause on your connected device with a single click, skips to the next track with a double click and skips back with a triple click. It will control a phone, too: a single click answers an incoming call and another click ends it, or a double click rejects a call. All that's rather impressive from a device so tiny, but there is more on offer for mobile use: there's a microphone built into the UP2 for hands-free calling, and it's also fitted with highly effective noise cancelling, to maintain call clarity.

PERFORMANCE

The Bluetooth implementation here is 5.0, bringing with it the ability to play high-resolution music, but the UP2 also has that USB DAC capability up its sleeve: connected to a computer using the high-quality cable provided, which is finished in a durable woven cloth sheath, it can be used to drive headphones from a laptop or computer to very good effect, making this a fine travelling companion for use on the move or when one is back home or in a hotel room in the evening.

Battery life is claimed at 11 hours from a two-hour charge, and in use that seemed like a pretty accurate claim, even though

I did miss the provision of a battery state indicator – I guess there's only so much you can do with a couple of little LEDs. Shanling also claims the UP2 will hold power for up to 200 hours in 'deep sleep', which could be handy, but I'd still like the reassurance of knowing how much power I had left before setting off anywhere.

What isn't in doubt is the sound quality of this tiny device, as one might expect given that it uses the respected ESS Sabre ES9218P digital-to-analogue conversion chip. I used it with various phones, and headphones ranging from tiny in-ear monitors to big over-ear designs, and the UP2 surprised not just in its ability to play at more than decent levels without any signs of stress but also with its dynamic, energetic yet well-controlled balance. Even when used between one of my Mac Mini computers and the line-in on an amplifier, the clean, generous sound was impressive.

Much of the technology here is derived from that little M0 player, so it's surprising that adding the UP2 to the player, connected digitally and driving headphones, delivers a sound of greater weight and definition than that of the remarkable player alone. It seems that even in the world of the miniature, separates may always beat a one-box system! **G**

● ESSAY

Hi-fi dealers – use them or lose them?

A growing trend in many areas for manufacturers to sell direct is coming to hi-fi too, it seems. Can this really replace the conventional hi-fi retailer?

Buy yourself a fridge or a washing machine from one of several online retailers these days and the chances are it won't turn up in a truck carrying the logo of the site from which you bought it. More likely it will be delivered direct from the manufacturer or distributor, and installed either by the maker's own staff or by contractors employed to do so.

Gone, it seems, are the days of the man from the friendly local electrical shop, clad in brown warehouse coat and flat cap, a roll-up behind his ear as he whistles his way up the front path with your new purchase on his sack-barrow. These days big companies have their eye on both their profit margins and the competition from rivals. If they can cut the price to the consumer while also getting a bit more for themselves, why wouldn't they?

Of course, that's all well and good for so-called 'white goods' – cooking, refrigeration, laundry and cleaning – but not so much so for 'brown goods', so-called from the days when TVs and radiograms came in rich wood veneers. After all, we want to look, listen and compare before we buy, don't we? You may buy a new washer/dryer with your head but hi-fi is a 'heart' purchase, to be sampled and considered at length before a decision is made. Around that sprang up a whole world of hi-fi shops with cosy demonstration rooms into which one could shuffle with some favourite music in order to audition. Not just select, note, but audition.

Trouble is, many of those hi-fi dealers of the golden age found themselves doing too much dusting and not enough selling, and were increasingly squeezed out of prime high street real estate and into side road or 'just out of town' locations, where not even the deer and the buffalo roam. Anyone who's been interested in hi-fi for a length of time can probably reel off a list of dear departed retailers, often with a sighed recollection that 'they were really good – not that I went in there very much ...'

Now, it seems, there's a new threat to the traditional way of buying hi-fi, with a number of manufacturers either taking the plunge into selling direct to the consumer or considering doing so. Some take the easy route, with an arrangement with Amazon or an only slightly covert eBay shop, run



Investing in the future: Hi-Fi Corner has created a £1.4m state-of-the-art showroom and it's reaping dividends – customers travel for the range, facilities and service

with a friendly retailer or a similar third party. Others, however, are being much more upfront about the whole thing.

Not so long ago I read that the US high-end manufacturer PS Audio was bringing all its US sales in-house, cutting off its retailers and, in future, shipping all its products straight from its HQ in

Traditional ways of buying hi-fi are under threat – the conventional path has too many costs involved


Boulder, Colorado, to American buyers. Commenting on the move, PS Audio founder and CEO Paul McGowan told the company's followers: 'While there are still some excellent dealers offering more than just an ability to order products – like advice, technical support, set-up, etc – an increasing number of sales in the United States are handled by online or catalogue merchants (the Amazon effect). While this "Home Depot" model of price first and service and support second works well in some industries, we don't think it serves our community as well as they deserve. The only way we can ensure the same high level of advice, help, easy trial at home and generous trade-in allowance for all our products is by moving to a direct model over the remaining months in 2019. What that means for our customers

will be consistently better service, better advice, same-day shipping, our industry leading trade-in programme where we pay full retail for your used equipment, a whole raft of new initiatives and programmes we've yet to roll out, and some exciting new products making their way into the world soon.'

Then, while I was still thinking about this move, I came across another example in the form of the Danish company Gato Audio. Like PS Audio, it operates in the high-end space, and yet it has decided to implement what it calls 'a new direct distribution concept', as a result of which its prices have fallen by some 40 per cent. For example, one product I was looking at for a review was £4900 and is now €2995 – shipped anywhere in the world, with a 14-day money-back trial period and online support. Sensibly, the UK distributor of that brand has done some renegotiation, with the result that UK customers can't buy direct from the manufacturer but the prices at which the products sell here have tumbled – to £2995 in the case of that particular product.

It seems that the traditional ways of buying hi-fi are under threat – the conventional manufacturer/distributor/retailer path has too many costs involved in it. Not all retailers think that's the way forwards, however, and I conclude with news from Scotland, where one of the best-known hi-fi/home entertainment specialists is bucking the trend.

Almost closed down by the fiasco of the building of a tram system in Edinburgh's West End, Hi-Fi Corner has chosen to relocate one of its stores to a purpose-built – and very swish – new showroom complex in the seaside area of Joppa, complete with six demonstration rooms and 8500sq ft of space, the result of a seven-figure investment. And it's paying off, with the company being visited even by customers from 'down south', tempted by the enormous range of product on demonstration.

Perhaps in the age of 'click and deliver', the way to tempt customers into conventional retail channels is to make them as unconventional as possible. The idea of 'destination shopping' may not be a new one but it could be time for it to come into its own once again. 

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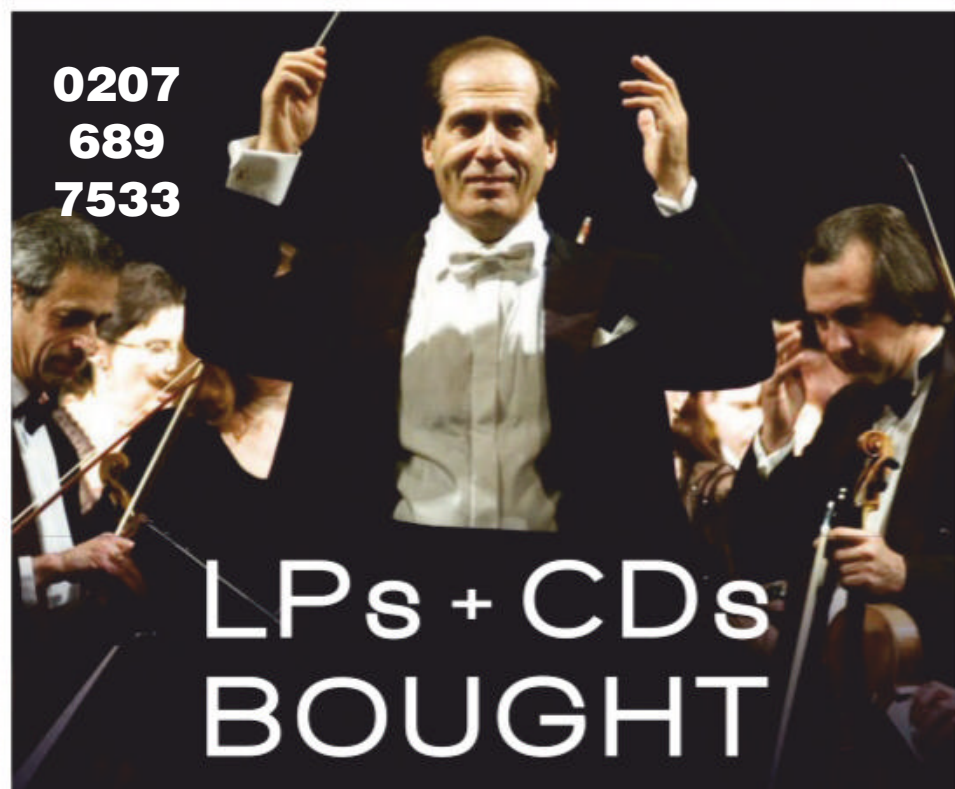


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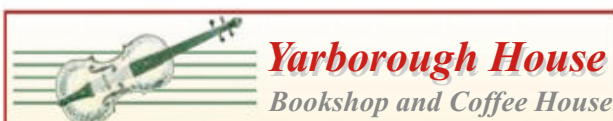
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NOTES & LETTERS

Pre-war Carnival of the Animals • Consistent comparisons • The great Ginette Neveu

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Stoki's 'lost' Carnival

In his *Carnival of the Animals* Collection (October, page 116), Jeremy Nicholas thought that the work's first complete recording was made by Stokowski in 1929 but remained unissued on CD. It was in fact released by Biddulph with booklet notes by Rob Cowan who gave Stokowski's performance the highest praise. Biddulph's remastering engineer was Mark Obert-Thorn, who kindly alerted me to the work's first recording in 1925 by Hamilton Harty and the Hallé Orchestra. This was followed in 1927 by a French Columbia set with the Paris SO conducted by Georges Truc.

In 1939, Stokowski re-recorded the work in Philadelphia, though it gets no mention from JN. That, too, came out on CD (Avid). JN's statement that he had never heard the 1929 set suggests that he ought to explore YouTube, since it is uploaded there, as indeed is Stokowski's 1939 remake.

Edward Johnson
London W11

Jeremy Nicholas writes: I am grateful to Mr Johnson for drawing my attention to these historical recordings of which I was unaware.

Too stuck in the past?

In his review of Christian Tetzlaff's latest recording of the Beethoven Violin Concerto (October, page 38) Rob Cowan praises the contrast between the overall heroic emphasis and the delicacy of the violinist's playing. The selected comparisons are all recent recordings by Tetzlaff and others. Mr Cowan explains his choice by quoting his earlier review: 'The main stumbling block on so many rival recordings of this work is a sort of romantic reverence, a trend challenged by Zehetmair, Kremer and others.' But there is a broader issue.

In the May 1976 issue of *Gramophone*, Robert Layton wrote: 'I have sympathy with younger collectors who read with irritation about the glories of some long since deleted rival ... It must seem scarcely relevant to the task in hand. Yet to banish from one's mind, when listening to a new record of, say, the Beethoven Violin Concerto, memories of Kreisler, Szigeti, Menuhin or Schneiderhan is as impossible as discarding perspective.'

Letter of the Month

Ginette Neveu, a talent to rival Oistrakh's

October 29 this year marked the 70th anniversary of the tragic death of Ginette Neveu, killed in a plane crash on the Azores while en route to a concert tour of America. She was an incomparably promising young violinist who had already, aged 30 at the time of her death, achieved so much. She won the inaugural Henryk Wieniawski International Competition in 1935, beating David Oistrakh in the qualifying competition by 26 marks and then again in the final; she was 15, he was 27. Her career was put largely on hold during the war, but thereafter she toured very extensively.

Perhaps her best-known recording is the Sibelius Concerto. Of it, the composer wrote, 'I particularly wish to record my feeling of profound gratitude when I think of the inspired and extremely sensitive performance of my Violin Concerto, which Ginette Neveu rendered unforgettable.' That recording has remained in the catalogue ever since.

There was a deep sense of loss in the musical world when news of her death came through. Touchingly, the bill posters outside the hall in Paris in which



Ginette Neveu: a great violinist remembered

she gave her last concert before leaving for the States left the concert poster, 'Ginette Neveu: Farewell Concert', undisturbed as a visible memorial to her passing. A street in Paris was subsequently named after her and she lies in Père Lachaise Cemetery, close to the grave of Chopin.

Alastair Macfarlane, via email

Thank you for this touching tribute. Readers may also be interested to read Tully Potter's Icons feature on Ginette Neveu in the April issue – Ed.

RAYMOND WEIL GENEVE

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Matters are further complicated because, in his welcome for the pre-war Kreisler recordings of the Beethoven Concerto in July 2019, RC speaks of Kreisler's 'incomparable artistry' and 'vibrant [playing]', continuing: 'There isn't a violinist anywhere on earth who can begin to approach this sort of standard.' This echoes Jerrold Northrop Moore's comment in September 1975 on the first reissue of Kreisler's first (1926) recording: '[This] has always seemed to me to occupy

a special place among all the recordings for its sovereign violin tone and phrasing of the solo part.' Should there be greater consistency in the reviews section?

Dr Roger Brown
Southampton

Editorial note

The Hong Kong PO's Concertmaster, Jing Wang (Awards issue, page 25), was formerly with Dallas Opera not the Dallas Symphony Orchestra.

OBITUARIES

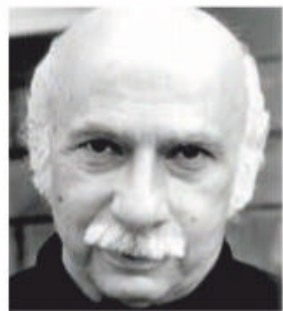
A major Georgian composer; a fine pianist; an industry stalwart

GIYA KANCHELI

Composer

Born August 10, 1935

Died October 2, 2019



Born in Tbilisi, Georgia, Kancheli studied composition at the city's Conservatoire. He became known to vast audiences on account of his work in film

(he wrote music for more than 40) and theatre, becoming Musical Director of the Rustaveli Theatre in 1971. At the same time, he wrote a remarkable series of symphonies, the Seventh (his last, entitled *Epilogue*, was written in 1986).

In '91, as the Soviet Union broke up, Kancheli moved to Berlin, and then in 1995 to Antwerp, where he became Composer-in-Residence to the Royal Flemish PO. But his exposure in the West had already begun to gain traction in 1992, when his epic *Liturgy: Vom Vinde Beweint* for solo viola and orchestra appeared on ECM Records, heralding a magnificent series of recordings of his post-Soviet work. Kancheli enjoyed the advocacy of such musicians as Kim Kashkashian, Dennis Russell Davies, Yuri Bashmet, Gidon Kremer, Kurt Masur, Mstislav Rostropovich and the Kronos Quartet. **Ivan Moody**

PAUL BADURA-SKODA

Pianist

Born October 6, 1927

Died September 25, 2019



Until his death, Badura-Skoda had been among the last pupils of Edwin Fischer still performing. He was much respected, having played

under the baton of Fischer's friend and colleague Wilhelm Furtwängler, as well as under Herbert von Karajan, Hans Knappertsbusch, Hermann Scherchen and George Szell. Along with his piano-playing contemporaries Friedrich Gulda and Jörg Demus, he was part of the so-called 'Viennese Troika'.

Badura-Skoda was an especially noteworthy exponent of Mozart's piano concertos, although his way with Schubert – most notably the piano-four-

hands repertory with Demus (DG) – was unforgettably persuasive. He toyed with many keyboard instruments, from accordion and a 'computer-controlled Bösendorfer grand piano' to numerous early instruments.

Perhaps most revealing of all are his two cycles of Schubert solo sonatas, the first from 1967-68 for RCA Victor (the CD reissue was reviewed by Jed Distler in December 2017) and a second recording (Arcana, 1991-96) where Badura-Skoda used only fortepianos from Schubert's time, or a little later.

Badura-Skoda also made distinguished chamber music recordings with the likes of the cellist Antonio Janigro and the violinist Jean Fournier; 20th-century music, too, was on his agenda.

He was widely celebrated for his musical scholarship, often along with his wife Eva Badura-Skoda. The couple edited one of the volumes of Mozart's piano concertos for the Neue Mozart-Ausgabe. They also produced books on the interpretation of the piano music of Mozart and the keyboard music of Johann Sebastian Bach, which have been translated into several languages.

Rob Cowan

QUITA CHAVEZ

Editorial Manager/Consultant – Gramophone

Born May 15, 1919

Died September 26, 2019



Quita Chavez, who was *Gramophone's* Editorial Manager from 1980 to 1984 and then Consultant to the Editorial Department, was one of those record-industry characters the like of which you simply no longer encounter.

Passionate about music, particularly opera, she worked at one of London's legendary record shops, EMG, then in the publicity department at Decca and for the newly emerging company of Philips. In 1961 she joined the editorial department of *The Gramophone*. When CBS started as an independent company in the UK she went to them, and later she had a second spell with Philips, leaving in 1980.

James Jolly

For the complete, unabridged versions of all three obituaries, visit gramophone.co.uk/news

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

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



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Zykan Vc Concs (pp1982/2005). <i>Schiff, H/ORF Vienna RSO/Segerstam/VPO/Mehta.</i>	ⓕ 0015046KAI
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Sir Tim Waterstone

The founder of the bookshop chain on discovering Rachmaninov – and on singing along to Vaughan Williams in the car!

I grew up in a completely unmusical family, no books, no music, but I went to boarding school very early – aged just six – and tried to learn the piano, and it gave me an interest in, and curiosity about, classical music. In the village was a music shop and I wandered in there one day. LPs had just come on the market – so about 1948 – and I was just poking around and the kindly owner of the shop asked what I was looking for. I said I didn't really know, I explained I played the piano a bit and was fascinated to learn more about what classical music was. So he said, 'How much money have you got?' and I said, 'None whatsoever'. So he said: 'What I'll do is I'll give you a scratched LP from the back of the shop, and if you like that, come back and I'll give you another one.' My mother was out, and so I put it on the radiogram and opened up the French windows into our garden and sat there, and this music burst forth, and it was a total, total revelation to me. It was a fantastic moment – I had absolutely no idea that classical music could be so beautiful. I'd been given the perfect choice for a child of that age – Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto with the Liverpool Philharmonic, and Cyril Smith the soloist. I just absolutely adored it, and kept on playing it and playing it.

I'm not really a chamber music man – I love the big concertos, the big symphonies, but I particularly love the human voice, and sacred music very much, big Masses and Requiems and oratorios. Verdi, Fauré, Schubert – I just absolutely love it, it reaches a part of me, dare I say, partly spiritual, partly artistic. And opera – I love the music but don't really love the theatre of it at all actually. Just over my coffee half an hour ago I played the wonderful Dame Eva Turner singing 'In questa reggia' from *Turandot* – gosh, shivers go down my back no matter how many times I hear that.

I love Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius*, an absolutely sublime oratorio – and Janet Baker was my choice for BBC's *Desert Island Discs*. I just love Janet Baker's voice – I only found out a couple of years ago that she'd started as a contralto then moved up into the mezzo repertoire, but there's something about the contralto left in her voice, that chocolatey quality. Much of Elgar resonates with me. I love both the symphonies (I actually prefer the Second to the First I think) and the Cello Concerto – it's lovely seeing it coming through to be really played throughout the world now.

I also love Goldmark's Violin Concerto, particularly the slow movement. So many wonderful soloists have tried to get the piece into the repertoire and yet it's never really worked. Itzhak Perlman tried very hard, with André Previn, in the 1970s, and Joshua Bell had a go at it, but nobody's succeeded.



THE RECORD I COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT

Rachmaninov Piano Concerto No 3

Martha Argerich; RSO Berlin / Riccardo Chailly

Philips

I love Martha Argerich's playing – the wildness of it, the humanity of it.

But it is so beautiful. I first encountered it in about 1990. We used to have a bookshop in Old Brompton Road and there was a little music shop on the corner of South Kensington tube station, and I wandered in just beaming with happiness – I was in love, and had just got married – and I heard this music playing on the turntable. I just stood there and thought: 'What is this? It is beautiful.' Afterwards, I went up and asked the assistant what it was. I do play it a lot, I think it's absolutely breathtaking, particularly in the Perlman recording.

I've been going deaf for a number of years and am losing my top register more and more as the years go on, which means that I'm listening to music in a different way to everyone else. The other day I was driving along in the car, Classic FM was on, and they played *The Lark Ascending*. And of course there comes a portion when it just ascends into the stratosphere, so for me, my radio went completely silent. So I sang what I remembered of the work and a minute and a half later, back it came on for me – and I was exactly at the right note at the right time. It made me laugh very much! 🎧

SERGEI PROKOFIEV



Photo : Philippe Matsas

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BRUNO PHILIPPE CHRISTOPH ESCHENBACH TANGUY DE WILLIENCOURT FRANKFURT RADIO SYMPHONY

With this new album devoted to Prokofiev, cellist Bruno Philippe continues his exploration of Russian music. Having already recorded a recital of Rachmaninov's and Myaskovsky's Sonatas with Jérôme Ducros, here he is reunited with his long-time musical partner Tanguy de Williencourt on the piano, but also with his mentor, conductor Christoph Eschenbach leading the Frankfurt Radio Symphony. On the program, Prokofiev's (surprisingly?) romantic cello sonata, coupled with his *Sinfonia concertante*, that Mount Everest of technical challenges – both works having been written for the great Rostropovitch, who gave them their first performances in 1950 and 1952.



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